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SELECTED WRITINGS OF WILLIAM SHARP

UNIFORM EDITION
ARRANGED BY
MRS. WILLIAM SHARP

VOLUME V

VISTAS

THE GYPSY CHRIST AND OTHER PROSE IMAGININGS

BY WILLIAM SHARP

SELECTED AND ARRANGED BY
MRS. WILLIAM SHARP

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PART I
Vistas

FOREWORD

To H. M. Alden

In dedicating to you this American edition of "Vistas" I am in the position of one of those islanders of old who offered their rude iron in exchange for wrought gold. They, however, bartered in all innocence: while I, for my part, know too well that nothing you can find herein can give you the same deep and lasting pleasure I have had in your beautiful and moving book,— the book of a lifelong dream, of a lifetime reverie, full of strange beauty, spiritual, wrought out of lovely thoughts into lovely words.

How well I remember the day when I first saw the Hudson in its autumnal glory! But memorable as that day is, shared with you and a dear common friend, poet and veteran critic,— in the "sixties" now, so far as years go, but in the wonderful "twenties" in all else,— my most living memory is of those proof-sheets of "The Following Love" which were entrusted to me, and made upon my mind so indelible an impression.[1]

[1] *Now, and so far less happily, surely, called "God in his World" (Harpers').*

Two years later I was with you again, when the shadow of ill lay almost more darkly upon you yourself than upon the blithe, heroic sufferer: and by that time I knew your book intimately, and had learned much from it. Then, too, I was able to show you one of these "Vistas," and to hear generous words in praise of what at best was a passing breath of music, as fugitive, and perhaps as meaningless to most people, as those faint airs heard by my charcoal-burner in the forest, as intangible as that odour of white violets which came and went with each delicate remote strain.

You asked me then what my aim was in those "dramatic interludes" which, collectively, I call "Vistas." I could not well explain: nor can I do so now. After all, I could make only a redundant use of the title. All are vistas into the inner life of the human soul, psychic episodes. One or two are directly autopsychical, others are renderings of dramatically conceived impressions of spiritual emotion; to two or three no quotation could be more apt than that of the Spanish novelist, Emilia Pardo Bazàn: "Enter with me into the dark zone of the human soul." These "Vistas" were written at intervals: the most intimate, in the spiritual sense, so long ago as the spring of 1886, when, during recovery

from a long and nearly fatal illness, "Lilith" came to me as a vision and was withheld in words as soon as I could put pen to paper. Another was written in Rome, after a vain effort to express adequately in a different form the episode of death-menaced and death-haunted love among those remote Scottish wilds where so much of my childhood and boyhood and early youth was spent. Some of my critics say that "Vistas" is but an English reflection of the Maeterlinckian fire. Two of the most Maeterlinckian are, by those critics, held to be "A Northern Night" and "The Passing of Lilith,"— creations, if such they may be called, anterior to the fortunate hour when I came for the first time upon "La Princesse Maleine" and "L'Intruse."

I say "the fortunate hour," for almost from the first moment it seemed clear to me that the Belgian poet-dramatist had introduced a new and vital literary form. It is one that many had been seeking,— stumblingly, among them, the author of "Vistas,"— but Maurice Maeterlinck wrought the crude material into a form fit for swift and dexterous use, at once subtle and simple. The exaggerations of his admirable method were obvious from the first; in "L'Intruse" even, more markedly in "Les Aveugles," unmistakably in "La Princesse

Maleine:" and, it must be added, still more prominently in his later productions. But he saw that there was a borderland for the Imagination, between the realms of Prose and Poetry. He discerned the need, even though it should be but the occasional need,— for after all it is only an addition to the old formulas that we seek,— of a more elastic method than any exercised in our day, one that would not restrict the elusive imagination nor yet burden it with verbal juggleries and license. There is room for the Imagination in Prose: there is room for the Imagination in Verse: there is room, also, for the Imagination in the vague, misty, beautiful borderlands. Of course there is nothing radically new in M. Maeterlinck's method. The Greek dramatists, the French, and, among others, Calderon notably, have all preceded him: the miracle-plays are " Maeterlinckian:" the actual form as now identified with his name was first used by his contemporary, Charles Van Lerberghe, in " Les Flaireurs." Probably there is never any quite new literary method. Certainly the greatest writers were not creators of the form or forms they adopted: Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Shakespeare, Racine, Goethe, Hugo. But after all, these things matter little. The " form," be it what it may, is open to all. Our

concern should be, not with the accident of formal similitude, but with the living and convincing reality behind the form, created or adapted or frankly adopted. No one would dream of an imputation upon a poet's originality if he choose to express himself in the sonnet form, the most hackneyed of all verse-formulas and yet virginal to each new wooer who is veritably son to Apollo.

A great creative period is at hand. Probably a great dramatic epoch. But what will for one thing differentiate it from any predecessor is the new complexity, the new subtlety, in apprehension, in formative conception, in imaginative rendering.

William Sharp.

1894.

Enter with me into the dark
zone of the human soul.
—EMILIA PARDO BAZAN.

Finis

. . . Blood for blood,
Bitter requital on the dead is fallen.

EURIPIDES: *Electra.*

FINIS

[An obscure wood, at whose frontiers neither night nor day prevails, but only a dread twilight, a brief way beyond the portals of the Grave. In the vast vault overhead no cloud moveth, no star shineth.]

THE PHANTOM OF THE MAN

The shadows deepen.

THE SOUL OF THE MAN

[*Blind with the darkness of death.*] On! On!

THE PHANTOM

This way let us go.

THE SOUL

Chill, chill, the breath from the Grave. Would that I too were dead.

THE PHANTOM

The wood is dark, and the shadows deepen.

THE SOUL

Canst thou see *nought?* Dost thou see *nothing?*

THE PHANTOM

I see nought. I see no one.

THE SOUL

This awful silence!

THE PHANTOM

Two shadows only — two shadows in the Hollow Land that move. We are they.

THE SOUL

Dost thou not hear?

THE PHANTOM

What?

THE SOUL

Afar off, as in the heart of the wood, a strange sighing.

THE PHANTOM

Is it the wind of Death?

THE SOUL

Is it the perishing lamentation of the dead?

THE PHANTOM

I see vast avenues penetrating the darkness of the wood.

THE SOUL

And there is no one there? There is nought visible?

THE PHANTOM

No shadow moves. No branch stirs. But always, always, leaves are falling: shadowless, soundless.

THE SOUL

Let us go back: let us go back! It may be that in the Grave there is a place of rest!

THE PHANTOM

I see the portals no more. A mist has risen.

THE SOUL

What lies behind us?

THE PHANTOM

Dim avenues. No shadow moves. No branch stirs. But always, always, leaves are falling: shadowless, soundless.

THE SOUL

Which way came we?

THE PHANTOM

I know not.

THE SOUL

Whither go we?

THE PHANTOM

I know not.

THE SOUL

Did we perish ere we entered the dark way of the Grave?

THE PHANTOM

The body died.

THE SOUL

[*Terrified.*] Who art thou?

THE PHANTOM

Thou.

[The Soul of the Man staggers wildly away, with outstretched arms, with lips

moving in agony, but silent. The Phantom of the Man stands motionless. In a brief while the Soul has wandered in a circle back to the place whence it started.]

THE PHANTOM

The shadows deepen. Let us go.

THE SOUL

[*In the bitterness of anguish.*] I am as a leaf blown by the wind.

[They move through the gloom of a vast avenue. There is no sound, no stir, no shadow, though ever there are falling leaves that fade into the under-darkness. From afar, within the hollow of the wood, there comes a faint sighing, that is as the sea in calm or as a wind that swoons upon the pastures, but is not any wind that breathes on any sea.]

THE SOUL

Doth it grow more dark?

THE PHANTOM

There is no change. It is neither day nor night. But far away the avenues reach into utter blackness.

THE SOUL

Doth a wind blow in the Shadow of Death?

THE PHANTOM

No wind bloweth through the Hollow Land,

though from the darkness beyond cometh a faint sighing.

THE SOUL

Dead prayers — dead hopes — dead dreams!

[A long silence: and still the twain move down the sombre avenues of the wood. There is no sound, no stir — only the fall of leaves forever and ever.]

THE PHANTOM

A great weakness is come upon me. I can fare no further.

THE SOUL

[*Terrified.*] Leave me not alone! Leave me not! Leave me not!

THE PHANTOM

Behold, another cometh. I perish.

[The soul stretched out its hands to its fellow, but nought can stay the fading and the falling of the leaf. From another avenue come two figures, the one leading the other.]

THE PHANTOM OF THE WOMAN

I am weary of the long quest. As a leaf goeth before the wind, I go.

THE SOUL OF THE WOMAN

Leave me not alone! Leave me not! Leave me not.

[The Soul of the Woman stretcheth out its hands to its fellow, but nought can stay the fading and the falling of the leaf.]

THE SOUL OF THE MAN

[*Whispering.*] O Death, give me thy sting! O Grave, suffer me to be thy victim!

THE SOUL OF THE WOMAN

Where art thou? Where art thou — thou who wast myself?

[The Soul of the Man stops, trembles, listens intently. Through the profound silence the leaves fall, but none seeth; for the Soul of the Man is blind, and blind the Soul of the Woman.]

THE SOUL OF THE MAN

[*In deep awe.*] Doth aught pass by?

[Profound silence.]

THE SOUL OF THE MAN

For the love of life, I beseech thee, art thou, who art in the silence, even as I am?

[Profound silence.]

THE SOUL OF THE MAN

[*In terror.*] It is Death.

[Profound silence.]

THE SOUL OF THE WOMAN

[*In a low whisper.*] At last! At last!

[Slowly the Soul of the Woman advances. The Soul of the Man listens intently, and an awful fear is upon him.]

THE SOUL OF THE MAN

Speak, thou that comest!

[There is a faint echo as of a rustling sound.]

It is leaves blown by the wind!

[There is an echo as of a rustling sound, nearer, and nearer, and nearer.]

What art thou?

[The faint rustling steps are close by. With tremulous, groping hands the Soul of the Man moves away, and then, paralyzed with terror, goes no further. He hears the faint steps encircling him, slowly, slowly. It is as of one groping blindly.]

THE SOUL OF THE WOMAN

[*Whispering.*] It is he!

THE SOUL OF THE MAN

Who spoke? Who comes? Oh, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?

[A low, thin sighing from afar in the darkness of the wood, as though of all dead prayers, dead hopes, dead dreams.]

THE SOUL OF THE MAN

[*Crying shrilly in his terror.*] Who comes? Who comes?

[The Soul of the Woman draws nigh, till it stands beside the other. Then with outstretched arms she gropes for him whom she seeketh. The Soul of the the Man cowers, sobbing in agony.]

THE SOUL OF THE WOMAN

Thou knowest.

THE SOUL OF THE MAN

Oh, God! Oh, God!

THE SOUL OF THE WOMAN

Yea, even so at the last, for death cometh unto all.

THE SOUL OF THE MAN

Have pity upon me, Agatha! Hast thou come to slay?

THE SOUL OF THE WOMAN

Thou knowest.

THE SOUL OF THE MAN

Death! Death!

THE SOUL OF THE WOMAN

I have waited long.

THE SOUL OF THE MAN

My sin — my sin — is there no expiation?

THE SOUL OF THE WOMAN

Yea, verily, at the last.

THE SOUL OF THE MAN

Oh, inner heart of hell!

THE SOUL OF THE WOMAN

There is no heaven and no hell but upon the earth. And unto some is heaven, and unto some is hell: but woe unto those by whom hell

is wrought for another, for his end is undying death and the horror of the grave.

THE SOUL OF THE MAN

Have mercy upon me!

THE SOUL OF THE WOMAN

Thou wert my hell.

THE SOUL OF THE MAN

Have mercy upon me!

THE SOUL OF THE WOMAN

Thou didst take the fresh life and pollute it with evil — thou didst seek me out to defile me — thou didst fling me into the mire and trample upon me — thou didst laugh me to scorn and drag me through the depths — and at the last, when once, only once, one gleam of brightness, one gleam of joy, came to me, thou didst foul it as death corrupts the carrion of the body, and didst work for me woe within woe, and hell within hell.

[The Soul of the Man suddenly throws his arms on high as though to ward a blow: then stoops, and flees like the wind down a sombre avenue of the obscure wood. For minutes, for hours — he knoweth not, he careth not — he goeth thus. Then, all at once, he stops; for nearer, nearer, he hears the sighing from the midmost of the darkness, the sighing as of dead prayers, dead hopes, dead

dreams. Suddenly there is a faint sound as of blown leaves. It draweth near.]

THE SOUL OF THE WOMAN

For thou hast wrought woe within woe for me, and hell within hell.

[The Soul of the Man staggers dumbly, stretches forth unavailing arms, and knoweth the agony of the second death. Then wildly, and with a triumphing cry —]

At the least I slew him — at the least I strangled him where he lay!

THE SOUL OF THE WOMAN

Was it thus?

[With a strange perishing cry the Soul of the Woman springs upon the other, and, clasping with both hands, strangles the Soul of the Man.

And in the sombre twilight of the vast avenues of the wood there is no sound; and in the darkness nought stirs, save the leaves falling forever, forever. Only from afar, in the uttermost darkness, there is a low sighing, that passeth not, that changeth not, and is as the vanishing breath of dead prayers, dead hopes, dead dreams.]

The Passion of Père Hilarion

SIRIA

Votre amour lui serait l'orage.

NURH

Je l'aime.

SIRIA

Malheur à lui.

NURH

Je l'aime.

SIRIA

Malheur à vous.

LE BARBARE.

THE PASSION OF PÈRE HILARION.

[A small, dark room, opening from the Sacristy of the Church of Notre Dame, in the village of Haut-Pré, on the French side of the Meuse. In the room, which is windowless, there is no light save the dull, yellow flicker from an iron cruse suspended from the low roof. Nought else is visible save a small iron bell jutting out above the door, connected with the outside by a string passing through a hole in the highest panel, and, on the further wall, a heavy metal crucifix. On the floor a man, in a priest's robes, lies at full length, face downward. Every now and then a convulsive shudder passes over his frame. He has lain thus for long, uttering no words, but praying silently with a passion that rends him. At last, with a low, sobbing sigh, Hilarion the priest rises, stands passively for a few moments, and then slowly advances till he is close to the crucifix.]

HILARION

Wilt Thou not hearken to my cry, O Thou who savest?

[A faint, dull resonance of his voice haunts the room for a few moments; then silence as of the tomb.]

HILARION

[*With broken, supplicating voice.*] O Thou who hast passioned, wilt Thou not have pity upon me in this mine agony? Lord, Lord, wilt Thou not save? Lo, I am younger than Thou wert when Thy bloody sweat fell in Gethsemane! Have compassion upon me, O Christ compassionate! I am but a man, and the burden of my manhood, the bitter burden of my youth, is heavy upon me.

[The dull, fading echo of a human voice; then silence as of the grave.]

HILARION

Speak, Lord.

Show me a sign!

O Thou who wast crucified for me, hearken!

O Friend, O Brother, O Heavenly Love, I beseech Thee!

Jesus, Son of Mary, wilt Thou not hear?

I cry to Thee, O Son of God!

I cry to Thee, O Son of Man!

[He bows his head, and waits for he knows not what, his lips twitching, and hands clasping and unclasping. Then, suddenly:]

What wilt Thou, O Son of Man? Am I not Thy Brother?

[Leaning forward, and speaking slowly:]

Art Thou dead indeed, O Thou who was crucified?

[The dull beat of sound around the walls: then silence as of deep night.]

I perish!
Stretch forth Thy hand and save!
I perish!

[Faintly round the tomb-like walls breathes the echo of the word: Perish. Then silence, chill and still as death.]

I am but a man, O God!
I am but a man, O Christ!
My sin is oversweet, and the world calls me, and I die daily, hourly, yea, every bitter moment!

[With a fierce cry, and wild gesture with his arms:]

What wouldst Thou? Doth not my neck break beneath the yoke?

[Suddenly he throws his priestly robe from off him. Beneath he has but a garment of hair and coarse serge, girt round the waist by a long rope heavily knotted. This also he removes, and then winds one end of the rope round his right

wrist. With swift sweep he swings the knotted rope above his head, and brings it down upon his quivering sides. Slowly and steadily the knotted rope rises, circles, falls; moment after moment, minute after minute. At the last, one, two, three of the great weals along the man's back and sides break, and the flesh hangs purple-red, and the blood runs in thin scarlet streams down his thighs. Then, with a low cry, he throws down the rope and sinks on his knees, quivering with agony and exhaustion.]

HILARION

[*With a low, choking sob.*] "Come unto Me, ye that are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest."

[The bell over the door clangs loudly. The priest slowly rises, puts on his hair shirt and stanches the blood as best he can, girds the rope about his waist, and dons again his long black robes. He is calm now, and deathly pale. Before he leaves, the Penitents' room he makes a grave obeisance before the crucifix, but in silence and with downcast eyes. He goes forth, and through the Sacristy to a side door, opening on to a wide, deserted village street. He stands in the doorway, looking out as in a dream. The day is far spent, and the shadows gather and lengthen. In an old inn, opposite, from

an open window, comes a woman's joyous laughter. The priest does not move, and seems neither to hear nor to see. A little later, the deep voice of a man slowly chants to a strange, monotonous tune:]

"Elle est retrouvée.
Quoi? L'éternité.
C'est la mer allée.
Avec le soleil." [1]

[The priest Hilarion abruptly turns away. muttering, as though in fierce pain, Oh, God! Oh, God! He passes into the Sacristy, and stands idly by a desk, brooding on the thing that is in his mind. A bell suddenly rings again. The sacristan enters and says that a woman is at the third confessional, and asks for Father Hilarion. He slowly leaves, and walks down the aisle toward his place, with bent head and heavy steps. As he reaches the box he looks back through the church toward the altar, where a young priest is leisurely lighting the candles. Below his breath he mutters:]

Avec le soleil."

[He enters the box and seats himself. A

"C'est la mer allée

[1] "Les Illuminations."

woman — veiled — tall, young, and with a figure of strange grace and beauty, is on her knees.]

HILARION

[*Quietly.*] My daughter.

THE WOMAN

[*Hurriedly.*] My father, my heart is . . .

HILARION

[*Abruptly rising, but seating himself again.*] Anaïs!

ANAÏS

Yes, Father Hilarion, it is I. No, no, I cannot call you so!

HILARION

Hush! Anaïs, God is pitiful. We will pray for His help, and that of His holy Son, and that of the Blessed Mary.

ANAÏS

There is no help but in ourselves.

HILARION

Here we are as shadows in a fevered dream. The voice of Eternity. . . .

[Stops abruptly, as in his ears rises an echo of the song:]

"L'eternite. . . .

C'est la mer allée
Avec le soleil."

ANAÏS

My heart breaks. The time has come: I must speak — and you, Hilarion — No, no, you must stay! Father Hilarion, I command you, as my priest, as my spiritual director! I must confess.

[She removes her veil, and in Hilarion's face a flush rises and fades as he looks again upon a face of such rare, surpassing beauty that even in dreams, before he first saw it, he had never beheld one lovelier, aught so lovely.

An acolyte, with a tall wax taper, passing by again, hears the swift whispering, the low, ardent tones of a woman's voice: and, once or twice, the deep murmur of Father Hilarion.]

ANAÏS

Better than the dream of heaven! He is my paradise!

HILARION

My daughter, this love is madness.

ANAÏS

Then better so. I am mad. Oh, are you a man? Do you not understand? I love him — I love him — I love him!

HILARION

My daughter, you must tell me all. What is this secret thing that lies betwixt you and — and this man?

ANAÏS

Hilarion!

HILARION

[*Troubled.*] Anaïs, my daughter!

ANAÏS

Hilarion!

[Hilarion half rises, then seats himself again. His face has grown paler, and his hand trembles.]

ANAÏS

Oh, my God, how I love him! What is the world to me? What is this paradise you dream of, this heaven you preach? He is my heaven, my paradise, my heart's delight, my life itself, my very soul!

[Anaïs bends forward, but hides her face from Hilarion, and sobs convulsively. The priest stares fixedly above her head into the gloom of the church beyond the uncurtained doorway.]

HILARION

[*In a low voice.*] Most Blessed Virgin-Mother, have pity!

[There is silence for some moments.

Anaïs slowly lifts her head and looks at the priest, who still stares fixedly into the gloom.]

ANAÏS

[*In a faint whisper.*] Beyond words! Beyond thought!

HILARION

Mary, Mother of Pity, hearken!

ANAÏS

[*Quivering, as she clasps her hands together.*] Life is a dream, and the dream is brief. O Love, Love, Love!

HILARION

Mater Consolatrix, save, oh, save!

[The grating, long loose, gives way, and falls with a clang upon the stone floor. Tremulously the priest lets his hand fall upon the head of Anaïs. Suddenly she takes his icy hand in hers, aflame as with fever.]

HILARION

My daughter, it is a sin to love so wildly. Only to God. . . .

ANAÏS

[*In a loud, mocking voice.*] Only to God!

HILARION

Hush, my daughter. I . . .

ANAÏS

Hilarion!

HILARION

[*Speaking low and hurriedly.*] My daughter, I am a priest. Thou must speak to me as to thy spiritual father. I . . .

ANAÏS

Three years ago, Hilarion . . .

HILARION

Anaïs, Anaïs!

[Anaïs bows her head over the priest's hand, and her lips are pressed against it. His face is deathly pale, and on his forehead are drops of sweat. With a sudden movement he extricates his hand from her grasp.]

ANAÏS

[*Murmuring.*] It is killing me!

HILARION

[*With a great effort.*] My daughter, there is neither rest, nor peace, nor beauty, nor happiness, nor content, nor any weal whatever in this world, save in . . .

[Anaïs raises her head and looks at him. He speaks no further. There is deep silence in the church, save for the shuffling step of an old beggar-woman, who slowly moves through the dusk, and at last sinks wearily on her knees.]

THE BEGGAR-WOMAN

[*Repeating a prayer of the Church.*] "For

this is Thy Kingdom, and we are Thy children, O heavenly King!"

HILARION

[*Mechanically.*] And we are Thy children!

ANAÏS

[*With a low, shuddering voice.*] And *this* is Thy Kingdom.

[Hilarion rises suddenly, as if about to go.]

HILARION

My daughter, confess to the Blessed Mary herself. She will give you peace.

ANAÏS

There is no peace for me. I love him with all my heart and all my soul and all my life, and I know that he loves me beyond all his dreams of heaven and hell.

HILARION

[*Hoarsely.*] Who is this man?

ANAÏS

He is a priest.

HILARION

[*Murmuring, half to himself.*] "He who transgresseth in this wise shall go down into the pit, and his undying death shall be terror beyond terror, and horror within horror."

ANAÏS

And for one kiss from his lips I would

barter this life; for one hour of love I would exchange this dream of a Paradise that shall not be. He is my day of sunshine and joy, he is my night of mystery and beatitude.

HILARION

[*Trembling.*] The curse shall lie heavy upon him. . . .

ANAÏS

Oh, joy of life!

HILARION

And upon you!

ANAÏS

Oh, the glad sunlight, the free air, the singing of birds; everywhere, everywhere, the pulse of the world!

HILARION

All that live shall die.

ANAÏS

And the dead know not: and if perchance they dream, it is Life.

[The voice of the Beggar-woman sounds hoarsely in the deepening gloom:]

"For in this life nought availeth, and only in the grave—"

ANAÏS

[*Whispering, as she draws closer to the aperture.*] Only in the grave!—O Heart of Love!

HILARION

[*In a strained voice.*] And this man — this priest?

ANAÏS

Thou knowest him.

HILARION

Better for him that he had never been born. Better —

ANAÏS

[*In a low, thrilling voice.*] Hilarion! Hilarion!

[The priest trembles as though in an ague. Anaïs again whispers, "Hilarion!"]

HILARION

[*Hurriedly.*] My daughter, I must go. I have to officiate.

ANAÏS

For the last time, Hilarion.

HILARION

Go, woman! We are in the hands of God. I —

ANAÏS

I die to-night.

HILARION

Anaïs!

ANAÏS

[*With a passionate sob.*] My darling, my darling! O Love, Love, Love!

[A bell clangs suddenly, and a young priest enters the church from behind the altar, bearing a light.]

THE BEGGAR-WOMAN

[*Mumbling loudly, as she rises to her feet.*] "For thine is the Kingdom, the Power, and the Glory — "

ANAÏS

[*Whispering eagerly.*] Where? Where?

HILARION

[*Slowly, and as if in a dream.*] By the bend of the river at Grand-Pré: where the Calvary of the seven willows is: an hour after moonrise.

[Anaïs hesitates a moment, then abruptly turns away and leaves the church. Hilarion passes into the aisle: walking slowly, with bent head, and lips moving as though in prayer. The young priest comes toward him.]

THE YOUNG PRIEST

Is it well with thee, Hilarion, my brother? Thou seemest in the shadow of trouble.

HILARION

[*Suddenly raising his head, and with a clear, ringing voice.*] It is well with me.

THE YOUNG PRIEST

And thou hast peace?

HILARION

Yea, at the last I have found peace.

THE YOUNG PRIEST

May, too, the joy that likewise passeth understanding —

HILARION

[*Interrupting, in a strange voice.*] Verily, it also hath come unto me at the last.

[He passes on, with head erect and flashing eyes. The young priest looks after him.]

THE YOUNG PRIEST

He is a dreamer — but a saint.

HILARION

[*To himself as he passes beyond the altar.*] Yea, the joy that likewise passeth understanding.

[The choristers are practising their chant of the day.]

Mère céleste de la Pitié!
De toute Eternité.

HILARION (*passes muttering*).

"Elle est retrouvée.
Quoi? L'éternité —"

[The choristers singing:]

On a retrouvé
O Mère bien-aimée,
Ton doux conseil —

HILARION (*slowly, as he passes from sight*).

"C'est la mer allée
Avec le soleil."

[Three hours later. The church is closed. The village is swathed in darkness, save for a few lights here and there. Across the great meadow that divides the village from the river moves a tall figure clothed in priest's robes. The dew upon the high grasses glistens with a faint sheen where swept by his skirts. A few emerald-green fireflies wander hither and thither through the gloom. A breath of wind comes and goes, bearing with it a vague fragrance of hay and roses and meadow-sweet. Once the priest stops and listens; but he hears nothing save the distant barking of a dog, and, close by, the stealthy wash of flowing water. Beyond the marshes of Haut-Pré the moon has risen. The marsh-water gleams like amber in torchlight. The priest moves on. As he draws nearer the river he sees, looming in a confused mass through the obscurity, the group of seven willows in the front of which stands the great Calvary. A sudden short essay of song thrills through the dusk. Then the nightingale is still. As the priest approaches the willows their upper branches glow as with dull gold in the welling wave of moon-rise. He descries the high ash-gray mass of the Calvary through their heavy boughs, and, beyond, the moving blackness, shot

with furtive gleams and sudden spear-like shafts of pale light, of the river. He passes the willows and stops as he nears the Calvary. He sees no one. Slowly moving forward, he stands on the bank of the river, and looks upon the dull, obscure flow of the water. Suddenly he turns and goes back to the Calvary, which he faces. A long, wavering shaft of moonlight illumes the woe-wrought face of the carven Christ. The priest stands with crossed arms, staring fixedly at the moonlit features of the God. The green fireflies wander fitfully betwixt him and the image: he sees them not. The nightingale gives three thrilling cries, passionate vibrations of forlornest music: he hears them not.

Through the tall dew-drenched grasses beyond there is a soft susurrus. The priest's ears are charmed, for still, with crossed arms, he stands staring fixedly at the tortured face of the dead God. Suddenly he starts, as, from beyond the mass of the Calvary, a fantastic shadow moves toward him. He steps aside, and through the thin, moon-illumined mist behind he sees Anaïs approach, the moonshine turning her hair to pale bronze and making her face as one of the water-lilies in the river.]

ANAÏS

[*Eagerly advancing.*] Hilarion!

HILARION

I am here.

ANAÏS

[*With fierce fervor.*] Let the priest die! It is you — it is you, Hilarion — whom I meet here. At last! At last!

[Hilarion is silent, and neither advances nor makes any gesture. Anaïs hesitates, then comes close up to him and looks into his eyes.]

ANAÏS

Hilarion, is it life or death?

[Abruptly the nightingale sends a low crescendo note throbbing through the moonlight.]

HILARION

[*Whispering and slowly.*] *Life — or — death.*

[With rapture swells the song of the nightingale, intoxicated with a mad ecstasy.]

ANAÏS

[*In a low voice.*] Ah, Hilarion, have you forgotten?

[Suddenly, with rapid diminutions, the nightingale's song sinks to a thin, aerial music: abruptly wells forth again: and then, in a moment, ceases absolutely. There is a faint beat of wings, a rustle, and then the bird swoops in slanting flight from the mid-foliage, circles twice round the

willow, and swiftly, as though an arrow, flies through the dusk across the river. Hilarion starts as though awakened from a trance.]

HILARION

[*Wildly.*] Anaïs!

ANAÏS

Hilarion! O my darling, my darling!

[She springs to his open arms, and, as he bends over her, kissing her passionately, she sees by the moongleam reflected from the Calvary how deathly white he is.]

HILARION

[*With a hoarse sob.* Heart of my heart — soul of my soul — my life — my joy — my heaven — my hell! Anaïs! — Anaïs!

ANAÏS

[*Extricating herself from his savage grasp.*] Is it life or — death — Hilarion?

HILARION

They are the same: it matters not.

ANAÏS

The nightingale has gone to his mate — yonder!

HILARION

Dear, if only —

ANAÏS

In the cottage, on the other side of the river

— Hilarion, there is no one there: it waits my brother Raoul's return: his clothes would fit you — he will not need them for months yet — he is still under arms. If they find your priest's robes in the river, they will know —

HILARION

Sst! What it that?

ANAÏS

It is the night-wind coming over the hay-fields from afar.

HILARION

Did no one speak?

ANAÏS

There is no one to speak. We are alone. None sees us but God.

HILARION

[*With a swift shudder.*] No one sees us but God.

ANAÏS

And He — He is so far away. He speaks not — He breathes not — He must be dead.

HILARION

[*Wearily.*] He speaks not — He breathes not — He must be dead.

ANAÏS

Is it not so? For —

HILARION

It is even so.

ANAÏS

And, dear, you have dreamed a long, bitter dream.

HILARION

Ay, a long dream.

ANAÏS

And the dawn is at hand. At last, at last! Oh, Hilarion!

HILARION

Thou sayest it.

ANAÏS

[*Suddenly sinking to her knees, sobbingly.*] My darling, forgive me! Hilarion, kill me!

HILARION

Sst! What is that?

ANAÏS

It is the night-wind creeping over the marshes of Haut-Pré.

HILARION

[*Suddenly.*] Life! Life! beautiful Life! Anaïs, let us go.

[He clasps her left hand in his right, and both walk to the river's bank.]

HILARION

Can we reach the other side in this high flood?

ANAÏS

Yes, by swimming. Hark! there is no time to lose. I hear, across the marshes, the bells of Urle. The floods are rising.

[Hilarion slowly discards his priest's robes, and then, as by an afterthought, strips himself also of his penitent's garment and stands forth naked in the moonlight. He looks broodingly into the dark flood of water moving stealthily past. Anaïs rapidly throws off her clothes. He turns just as she stands forth in all her naked beauty, like a vision of embodied moonlight.]

HILARION

Anaïs!

ANAÏS

Because I too am drowned.

[Hilaron hesitates a moment, then steps to her, takes her in his arms, kisses her wildly again and again. Then saying simply, *Come,* he clasps her hand and they both enter the water. When Anaïs is breast-high they stop. Hilarion stoops and kisses her long upon the lips.]

HILARION

If there be no morrow —

ANAÏS

Dear, with you I fear neither life nor death. Neither death nor life.

[They enter the black shadow of midstream, and silently swim side by side, till at last

they gain the opposite bank. There, hand in hand, they stand a brief while, breathing heavily, and looking back upon the boundary they have crossed forever. As the moonshine slowly waves northward, Anaïs, turning, descries the vague outline of her brother's unoccupied cottage. Stealthily she withdraws her hand from Hilarion's clasp and noiselessly slips from his side, through the deep shadows, toward the cottage. He stands alone, white in the moonlight, passive as a statue. Suddenly he gives a hoarse cry, leaps down the bank and into the water again. With swift, fierce strokes he swims rapidly across the river, bearing hard against the current, but swerving neither to right nor to left. As he nears the opposite bank he staggers, clutching the reeds: then, stooping, half-climbs, half-leaps up the bank, and, having gained it, walks swiftly toward the Calvary. The moonlight is now all about it, except at the head of the crucified God, which is in deep shadow. Hilarion the priest stands in front of the Calvary, staring fixedly upward. Slowly he advances, and stands on the highest of the three low steps of the pedestal of the cross, and, straining every muscle, scrutinizes the carven face of agony.]

HILARION

[*In a hoarse whisper.*] Behold, the God is verily dead.

[Nothing stirs in the silence, in the moonlight, in the darkness.]

HILARION

Wilt Thou save, even now, O my Lord?

[Nothing stirs in the silence of the moonlight, of the darkness.]

HILARION

[*In a loud, vibrant voice.*] Wilt Thou save Thyself, Thou Lord without lordship, Thou fallen God!

[In the darkness, in the moonlight, nothing stirs.]

HILARION

[*Furiously.*] Ah, Thou dead God!

[Hilarion the priest leaps forward, and, with wild gestures and savage violence, tears the crucified figure from the cross and hurls it to the ground. Then, in panting silence, he sways to and fro with his arms claspt round the cross, which at last yields, breaks, and falls to the ground. He seizes it and drags it to the bank and thrusts it into the river, silently watching it sink half way in the ooze of the reeds. Then returning, with a low, triumphing cry, he grasps the carven figure, and, having reached the bank again, lifts the image above his head, poises it a moment, while the moonshine clothes him as with a garment, and then, with desperate fury, hurls it with a great effort far amid-stream.

The Passion of Père Hilarion

[The moonlight lies like a white transparent cloud along the bank, and along the nearer half of the flood: on the further side the darkness is now profound, and the river seems narrowed to a stream. Far off, in the marshes, the frogs croak: the crickets in the distant meadows shrill incessantly, over the pastures a fern-owl hawks with a strange choking cry. Otherwise, silence, and utter peace. The man draws himself up to his full height, turns toward the unseen village beyond the great meadow, silver-white with moonshine and dew, and raises his right arm menacingly. But he lets it drop, speaking no word. Then, turning again, he moves slowly toward and into the river. The moonlight turns the white skin of his shoulder into amber, as he swims across the flood. Then he passes into the darkness. In profound darkness he swims toward the shore: in profound darkness he scales the opposite bank: through the profound darkness beyond, his voice, hoarse, yet vibrant and echoing, calls with mad joy:]

Anaïs! Anaïs!

Enter with me into the dark zone of the human soul.

EMILIA PARDO BAZAN.

The Birth of a Soul

THE BIRTH OF A SOUL

[A bedroom, austerely furnished, in an old city of Flanders. To the left, a "Spanish throne," as such beds are called — heavy with sombre woodwork and huge all-length canopy; with tall, dark, thick curtains at the top and at the bottom; and approached by three low wooden steps belonging to and running the whole length of the bed. In the bed a woman, about to give birth to a child. Kneeling at a chair betwixt the head of the bed and the bare table with dull green cloth, on which is a low-shaded reading lamp, is a man, the father of the unborn child. To his left, a Sister of Mercy, also kneeling, but at the lowest of the three steps of the bed. To his right, kneeling at a chair near the table, a priest. The door of the room, to the right behind the bed, conspicuous by its black-oak panelling. At the opposite side of the room from the bed: to the right, a tall, fantastically carved black-oak clock, with clay-white face, with hands broken and dangling this way and that: beyond it, to the left, in a deep-set recess, an old Flemish window.]

THE PRIEST

[*Kneeling at a chair, praying aloud.*] O

God, may the child that cometh unto us from Thee be blessed by Thee to purity and strength. May he come as a scourge to the wrong-doer, as a message of peace to the righteous.

THE MAN

[*Kneeling at a chair near the head of the bed, praying silently.*] O God, may the child that is to be born to us not be a man-child. Already, already, O God, the curse that is within me has descended into the third generation.

THE PRIEST

[*Praying aloud.*] And if the child be a woman-child, O Lord, may she be a lamp of light in dark places, a godly presence among the evil.

THE WOMAN

[*Praying in the silence.*] O God, may the child that is within me not be a woman-child, so that she may never know the bitterness of shame and all the heritage of woman's woe.

ANOTHER

[*Unseen and unheard: in the deep shadow at the end of the bed.*] Thou living thing within the womb, when thou art born I shall dwell within thee as thy soul. And the sin of the woman, the which I am, shall lie like a canker-worm within thy heart: and the evil of

the man, the which I am, shall eat into thy inmost being. And thou shalt grow in corruption. And thy end shall be nothingness.

THE PRIEST

[*Aloud.*] Have mercy, O God, upon this immortal soul!

THE OTHER

[*In the shadow.*] For in the shadow of hell wast thou conceived, and out of the horror of the grave I come.

THE SISTER OF MERCY

[*Aloud, kneeling betwixt the table and the bed.*] Amen! Hear, O Blessed Mary; hear, oh, hear!

THE MAN

Have pity upon us!

THE MOTHER

O Christ, son of Mary, save me!

THE PRIEST

[*Aloud.*] For it is Thine!

THE SISTER OF MERCY

Thine!

THE OTHER

[*In the shadow.*] Mine!

[Silence for some minutes. The clock ticks loudly. A sound as of an opening and closing door somewhere. The Priest looks up for a moment, thinking he heard

someone rise from the deep-set window-seat at the far end of the chamber and come slowly across the room. But he sees no one. He bends his head again, and prays inaudibly.]

THE MAN

[*With his face buried in his hands.*] If it be possible, let this thing —

[Stops, as there comes from the bed a sound of low, shaken sobs.]

THE WOMAN

[*Below her breath.*] . . . Even so, Virgin Mother, Most Pure!

THE OTHER

[*In the shadow.*] Yea, so.

[Again a prolonged silence. All wait, knowing the woman's agony is at hand. The right hand of the father shakes as though he were in an ague. The sweat on his forehead moves slowly down his face in large, heavy drops.]

THE MAN

[*Suddenly.*] Who knocks?

THE PRIEST

No one knocked.

THE WOMAN

[*In a high, faint, perishing voice.*] Who knocks?

[The Sister of Mercy rises and goes to the

door. Opens and closes it, saying as she returns to her post:]

THE SISTER OF MERCY

There is no one there.

THE WOMAN

[*Shrilly.*] Who came in just now?

THE SISTER OF MERCY

No one. It is I.

THE WOMAN

[*In a low sighing tone.*] It is the end.

THE OTHER

[*In the shadow.*] It is the beginning of the end.

[A prolonged silence, save for the endless moaning and occasional convulsive cries of the woman. At last the Priest rises, and sits by the table. He pulls the shaded lamp towards him, and begins to read from a book:]

THE PRIEST

Unto us a child is born —

[The woman sits up convulsively in bed, with her face turned almost round upon her right shoulder, her eyes staring in horror.]

THE WOMAN

Who touched me?

THE SISTER OF MERCY

[*Rising.*] Hush!

[She comes over to the bed, gently persuades the woman to lie back, and then kneels beside the bed.]

THE SISTER OF MERCY

There is no one here but those who love you. There is no one here but those whom you see.

THE OTHER

[*In the shadow.*] And I!

[In the heavy curtains behind the bed a current of air seems to move for a moment.]

THE WOMAN

[*White with fear, whispering.*] Who sighed behind me?

THE SISTER OF MERCY

There is no one here but those who love you. There is no one here but those whom you see.

[Again silence, but for the monotonous moaning of the woman. The clock strikes the quarter. The man rises, goes to the window, stares forth steadily, then returns.]

THE MAN

There is no one there.

[The woman's limbs move slowly beneath the coverlet. Her breathing is high and quick, though ever and again it stops

abruptly. Her hands wander restlessly to and fro, ceaselessly plucking at nothing.]

THE SISTER OF MERCY (*in a low voice*).

Ave Maria!

[The woman's hands never cease their pluck, pluck, plucking at nothing.]

THE PRIEST

[*Muttering to himself.*] It will soon be over.

THE OTHER

[*In the shadow.*] It has begun.

[The man rises, goes to the window, stares forth steadily, then returns.]

THE MAN

There is no one there.

[The woman's hands cease their wandering sidelong pluck, pluck, pluck. She raises both hands slowly, rigid, emaciated. When they are above her head they suddenly fall. The right strikes the wooden edge of the bed, and hangs stiffly by its side. The Sister of Mercy replaces it, the woman watching her fixedly.]

THE PRIEST

[*Starting up suddenly, and trembling.*] My brethren, if so be —

THE MAN

[*Pointing.*] What — who — is that?

THE PRIEST

My son, there is nought there?

THE MAN

Who stirred in the deep shadow at the end of the bed?

THE SISTER OF MERCY

Hush! for the love of God! The woman is in labour.

[There is a sound as of some one drowning in a morass: a horrible struggling and choking.]

THE PRIEST

[*Holding up a small crucifix.*] O God, have pity upon us!

THE SISTER OF MERCY

O Christ, have pity upon us!

THE MAN

[*Peering into the shadowy gloom at the end of the bed.*] O Thou, have pity upon us!

THE PRIEST

[*Chanting.*] O Death, where is thy sting!

THE OTHER

[*In the shadow.*] In thy birth, O Life!

THE PRIEST

[*Chanting.*] O Grave, where is thy victory!

THE OTHER

[*In the shadow.*] I am come.

[There is a sudden cessation of sound. The Sister of Mercy lifts something from the bed. There is a low, thin wail. The man does not see, and does not seem to hear. He kneels at his chair, but his head is turned away, and he stares fixedly toward the window.]

THE SISTER OF MERCY

She is dead.

THE PRIEST

O God, receive her soul! O Christ, have pity upon her! O most Holy Mother of God, have mercy upon her!

THE OTHER

[*In the shadow.*] Woman, abide yet a little. Give me thy life.

THE SISTER OF MERCY

The child liveth. It is a man-child.

THE PRIEST

[*Touching the man.*] It is a man-child.

THE MAN

[*Still staring fixedly at the window, repeats, in a slow, dull voice.*] It is a man-child.

[The man slowly rises, turns, and walks to the bedside. He stares upon the dead face.]

THE PRIEST

[*Ending rapidly.*] As it was in the beginning —

THE SISTER OF MERCY

Is now —

A VOICE

[*Near the window.*] And ever shall be.

THE PRIEST

[*Trembling.*] Who spoke?

THE SISTER OF MERCY

No one.

[The Priest falls on his knees and, covering his eyes, prays fervently. The man lifts the child from the Sister's arms. Its eyes open upon him. As he looks at it his face grows ashy pale. His whole body trembles. His eyes seem as though they would strain from their sockets.]

THE PRIEST

[*Rising, and in a loud, clear voice.*] O Death, where is thy sting!

[The man looks at what was the woman.]

THE PRIEST

O Grave, where is thy victory!

THE MAN

[*Looking on the face of the child, who is fixedly staring beyond him.*] Here.

A Northern Night

That dark hour, obscurely minatory, in the tide of two lives . . . when, unforeseen and unrecognized, Love and Death come in at the flood together.

SIWÄARMILL.

A NORTHERN NIGHT

[An hour after midnight. A desolate district of Northern Scotland, hemmed in by mountains and innumerable lochs and tarns and deep, narrow streams. In the remotest part of it, miles from the nearest hunt, a semi-ruinous "keep," Iorsa Tower, at the extreme north end of Loch Malon. It is dead of winter. For weeks the land has been ice-bound. The deer and the hill-sheep are starving; only the corbies and eagles gorge their full. Iorsa Keep stands out black against the snow-covered wilderness. A dull, red light, high up, like a staring eye, gleams under a projecting ledge. There is no sound but the occasional crack of the bitter frost, and, at intervals, the wind pressing in the frozen surface of the snow depths. In the one habitable room sit two figures, before a rude fire of pine-logs. Most of the room is in deep shadow. The flickering flame-light discloses a small, deep-set window to the left. Between it and the hearth-place, and close to the wall, a bed, startlingly white in the midst of the gloom. Over it, on the wall, the flying lights flash momently on old disused weapons.

In all the wild lands around there is not a

living soul except the twain who sit before the fire.]

MALCOLM

The black frost is about to break: I hear the wind ruffling the snow.

HELDA

Is it the snow?

MALCOLM

Go to the window and look out. You will see the thin, frozen snow beginning to fly along the loch like spray. The wind rises.

HELDA

No; I am afraid.

MALCOLM

[*Rising.*] Then I will go. . . . See, the window is open, and you can now hear the wind.

HELDA

Oh, how cold it is.

MALCOLM

The wind is blowing from behind: it did not come in at the window.

HELDA

Yes, yes, it did: and . . .

MALCOLM

[*Returning to Helda's side.*] Is not the fire comforting? The logs are red-hot, sparkling and sputtering.

[Helda, slightly shivering, glances at him, and then draws nearer to the fire.]

MALCOLM

Are you not glad we are no longer on the ice?

HELDA

Yes: oh, yes, yes.

MALCOLM

And that we are here at last, we two! Oh, Helda!

HELDA

Yes, I am glad that we are no longer upon the ice.

MALCOLM

Why do you repeat yourself, Helda?

[Helda, in silence, looks straight before her into the fire.]

MALCOLM

Why are you glad?

HELDA

Because I feared that we were followed.

MALCOLM

Who would have followed us? Who could have followed us?

[Helda stares fixedly, and in silence, at the glowing embers.]

MALCOLM

No one followed us.

HELDA

Thrice, when I looked behind my shoulder, I saw a shadow flying along the ice.

MALCOLM

The half-moon was as ruddy as a torch-flame. We should have seen any one who followed us. And when we reached the frozen loch we could see all around.

HELDA

It was there I saw the flying shadow

MALCOLM

I heard no one. I heard nothing.

HELDA

Nor I, except the hiss of the wind blowing the ice-spray over the loch.

MALCOLM

There was no wind.

HELDA

The ice-spray flew before the blast. I saw a little cloud of it behind.

MALCOLM

There was no wind. And now, I have told you, the wind is from behind the house.

HELDA

Then it blew toward the house.

MALCOLM

Well, it does not matter. "The wind cometh and goeth."

HELDA

[*Slowly, and as to herself.*] It cometh — and goeth.

MALCOLM

I wonder what they are doing at the castle. The dancers will have gone now. Perhaps they will be putting out the lights.

HELDA

If we have been missed?

MALCOLM

No one will miss us. But, if so, what then? My father knows that those of us for whom there is not room in the castle will sleep for the night in some of the farm-houses near. As for you, if you are missed they will think you have skated back to Castle Urquhar. No one can know. We are as safe here, my beautiful Helda, as though we were in the grave.

HELDA

Hush! Do not say such things.

MALCOLM

Darling, we are safe here. We are miles from the nearest hut even. No one ever comes here.

HELDA

Malcolm, I wish — I wish —

MALCOLM

What is it, Helda? Speak.

HELDA

I wish we had not done this thing. He—

MALCOLM

Who?

HELDA

You know whom I mean: Archibald Graeme.

MALCOLM

Never mind that old man. You will have more than enough of him soon. Is it still fixed that the marriage is to take place ten days hence?

HELDA

He is a good man. He has saved my father from ruin.

MALCOLM

Will he take you away? Will he take you to the South-country?

HELDA

And he loved my mother. He loves me because he loved her.

MALCOLM

He is soon to be so passing rich, Helda. I am to starve, to famish for you, Helda.

HELDA

Dear, I love you with all my heart and with all my soul. You know it. I have

given you my secret joy, my true life, my whole love, myself.

MALCOLM

Love like ours would redeem . . .

HELDA

Hark!

MALCOLM

It is the wind.

HELDA

It blows again across the loch, against the window.

MALCOLM

No, dear Helda, it is but an eddy. The wind rises more and more, but from the north.

HELDA

[*Whispering.*] Some white snow was blown up against the window!

MALCOLM

Dearest, you are imagining. No snow can blow against this window with the wind as it is, for the gable shuts us off.

HELDA

[*Trembling, and with hands claspt.*] I saw a round drift of something pale as snow pressed against the window.

MALCOLM

I will convince you.

[Rises, and opens the window. There is no snow on the sill. The wind strikes the Keep behind with a dull boom, and rushes overhead with an incessant screaming sound. But in front all is as quiet as though it were a windless night.]

MALCOLM

See, dear, there is no snow: and hark! the wind blows steadily southward.

[Closes the window, and returns to Helda's side.]

HELDA

Malcolm, you will not be angry with me — if I — if I . . .

MALCOLM

What?

HELDA

If I pray. I have not prayed for a long time from my heart. To-night I fear the darkness without a prayer. I will say no words, but I must pray.

MALCOLM

Pray if you will, Helda.

HELDA

Yes, . . . yes; . . . I must pray!

MALCOLM

Dear, as you will. You would be alone? . . . See: I shall be in the corridor outside. Call me when you wish me to return. But

have mercy on me, sweetheart! Remember that there is no fire out there, and that the air is chill along those stone flags.

[Rises and leaves the room. He has scarcely closed the door ere Helda cries loudly:]

HELDA

Malcolm! Malcolm! Come at once! Malcolm!

MALCOLM

[*Abruptly re-entering.*] What is it? . . . what is it, Helda? Has anything frightened you?

HELDA

Yes, the whiteness at the window: the snow at the window!

MALCOLM

Oh, Helda, Helda, there is no snow at the window.

HELDA

Malcolm, are there any birds that fly by night?

MALCOLM

The owls fly by night, but not at dead of winter.

HELDA

No bats, no moths?

MALCOLM

No.

HELDA

When I looked out at the window when we came in here I saw that there were no trees near, and that no ivy grows up this side of Iorsa.

MALCOLM

There is none.

HELDA

[*In a low, strained voice.*] Malcolm, it was as though there were birds tapping at the window.

MALCOLM

You are nervous, darling. Come, let us forget the dark night, and the wind, and the bitter cold. *We* are here, and the world is ours to-night.

HELDA

Hush! There it is again!

MALCOLM

That sound is in the room.

HELDA

Malcolm! Malcolm!

MALCOLM

My foolish Helda, how easy it would be to frighten you. It is only a little insect in the wall.

HELDA

The death-watch?

MALCOLM

Yes, the death-watch.

HELDA

[*Shuddering.*] It is a horrible name. *Sst!* How the wind wails.

MALCOLM

I hope . . .

HELDA

What?

MALCOLM

I hope it does not bring too much snow.

HELDA

Why?

MALCOLM

We are a long way from home, Helda.

HELDA

Do you fear that we cannot get back if the snow fall heavily?

MALCOLM

If it drifts we cannot skate. But there is no snow yet. There will be none before morning.

HELDA

Darling, I have lost all fear. I am with you. That is enough. If it were not for my father's sake, I wish we could die to-night!

MALCOLM

My beautiful Helda, my darling, my heart's delight!

[They stand awhile together by the fire, she leaning against him, and his left arm round her. A log falls in. Another gives way with a crash. There is only a red gulf of pulsating glow, with over the last charred log pale blue frost-flames flickering fantastically. Suddenly they turn, and look into each other's eyes. Malcolm's shine strangely in the half-light, and his face has grown pale. A tremulous flush wavers upon Helda's face. His breathing comes quick and hard. She gives a low, scarce-heard sob.]

MALCOLM

My darling!

HELDA

Oh, Malcolm, Malcolm!

[An hour passes. . . .

The fire has fallen in, and smoulders beneath such a weight of ash and charred wood that the room is in complete darkness. Outside, utter silence. The wind has suddenly lulled. Malcolm and Helda lie in each other's arms, but neither has spoken for some time.]

HELDA

Malcolm!

MALCOLM

My darling!

HELDA

You will not go to sleep? I am so happy, oh, I am so happy, here in your arms, Malcolm; but I should be afraid if you slept.

MALCOLM

Do you think I would sleep, Helda, to-night of all nights in my life?

HELDA

[*After a long silence.*] It is so still.

MALCOLM

The wind has suddenly fallen.

HELDA

Move your arm, dear. Malcolm, . . . Malcolm, I wish it were not so dark! I never knew such darkness.

MALCOLM

The fire smoulders. It will not go out. When we rise, I shall blow the flame into life again.

HELDA

I wish it were not so profoundly, so fearfully dark.

MALCOLM

Sweetheart, if you are unhappy, I will stir up the heart of it at once. I will do it now.

[Rises from the bed, and stirs the smoulder-

ing fire. A flame shoots up and illumines the room for a moment. Malcolm places a fresh log in the glowing hollow he has disclosed, and returns to Helda. She is cowering against the wall, and shivering with fear. As soon as he is beside her she clings close to him, and moans faintly.]

MALCOLM

Helda, Helda, what ails you? What is it?

HELDA

Malcolm, let us go; let us go at once!

MALCOLM

Dearest, do not be so frightened at nothing. Are we to lose this precious night together because of a death-watch ticking in the wall, or a blown leaf tapping against the window?

HELDA

Oh, Malcolm, what was it?

MALCOLM

What? When?

HELDA

When you rose and stirred the logs, and the flame shot up for a moment, I saw . . .

[Stops, shuddering.]

MALCOLM

Tell me, darling. . . .

HELDA

I saw some one — a — a — something —

rise from the end of the bed and slip into the darkness.

MALCOLM

Oh, foolish Helda, to be so easily frightened by my shadow. Of course my shadow followed me, dear!

HELDA

It was when you were at the fire! The — the — shadow was not yours.

MALCOLM

Ah, there is a wild bird fluttering in that little heart of yours!

HELDA

Dear, when you kiss me so I fear nothing more. Nothing — nothing — nothing!

MALCOLM

Nothing — nothing — nothing!

HELDA

Ah, yes, hold me close, close! My darling, I have given you all. Nothing now can come between us!

MALCOLM

Nothing, my beautiful Helda. And, dear [*whispering*], you do not wish to go yet? The morning is still far off.

HELDA

[*Whispering lower still, and with a low, glad cry.*] Not now, not now!

[Profound silence, save for their sighs and kisses.]

MALCOLM

[*In a low voice.*] And when old Archibald Graeme . . .

HELDA

[*Starting half up.*] Hark! What was that?

MALCOLM

[*Listening.*] It was nothing. Perhaps the wind rose and fell.

HELDA

[*Fearfully.*] If it was the wind, it is in the house! I hear it lifting faintly from step to step.

MALCOLM

[*Listening more intently.*] There must be wind behind the house. It is causing draughts to play through the chinks and in the bare rooms.

HELDA

[*Sitting up in bed and staring through the darkness.*] It is in the corridor!

MALCOLM

In the corridor?

HELDA

Yes; that low, ruffling sound.

MALCOLM

The wind is rising.

HELDA

[*Whispering.*] Malcolm, don't move; don't stir. It is at the door.

MALCOLM

I hear it: it is a current of air swirling the dust along the passage.

HELDA

[*With a low cry.*] Oh, Malcolm, it is in the room! What is it that is moving so softly to and fro?

MALCOLM

[*Springing from the bed.*] Ah, I thought so. The window is open: I must have left the latch unfastened. There: it will not open again!

HELDA

The window was not open before, Malcolm.

MALCOLM

Ha! there is the snow at last! I hear its shovelling sound against the gable. Darling, we must go soon.

HELDA

[*Sobbing with fear.*] It is in the room! It is in the room! It is in the room!

MALCOLM

There is no one here but ourselves, Helda. That sound is the shoving of the snow along the walls.

HELDA

It is some one moving round the room. O Christ, help us!

MALCOLM

Listen!

[They both sit up, listening intently. For nearly three minutes there is profound silence.]

HELDA

Oh, my God!

MALCOLM

Be still, for God's sake! Do not move.

HELDA

[*Shudderingly.*] Ah-h-h-h!

MALCOLM

[*In a low voice.*] Some one is at the door.

HELDA

[*In a dull echo.*] Some one is at the door.

MALCOLM

[*Whisperingly.*] Quick, Helda! rise and dress.

HELDA

I cannot. Oh, my God, what is it that moves about the room? What is within the door? Oh, Malcolm, save me!

MALCOLM

Let me go! Do not be frightened: I shall move that log, and then we shall see.

[Rises, and pulls the log back. A shower of sparks ascends: and then a clear, yellow flame shoots up and illumines the room. There is a wild wail of wind in the chimney, and then a long, querulous sighing sound, culminating in a rising moan. A handful of sleety snow is dashed by a wind-eddy against the window.]

MALCOLM

Arise!

HELDA

Come to me. I—

[Helda cowers back in her bed with, lips drawn taut with terror and eyes staring wildly.]

MALCOLM

[*Suddenly, in a loud, imperative voice.*] Who is there?

[Dead silence.]

MALCOLM

Who is there?

[Dead silence.]

HELDA

[*With a strange, sobbing cry.*] It is Death!

[She falls back in a death-like swoon.]

MALCOLM

Oh, my God.

[He takes Helda in his arms, kissing her passionately. Slowly, at last, she opens her eyes.]

MALCOLM

My darling, my darling! Be frightened no more, Helda! . . . Dearest, it is I. . . . Malcolm! . . . There is no one there.

HELDA

[*Whispering.*] Oh, Malcolm, did you hear what he said?

MALCOLM

You were frightened by the stillness; . . . by the wind; . . . the wandering eddies of air in this old place; . . . by . . . by . . .

HELDA

God grant it! Dear, we have paid bitterly for our joy.

MALCOLM

Not too much, Helda! I would go through Hell itself for such rapture as we have known.

HELDA

My darling, I can never face him — I can never face him, with his fierce, penetrating eyes! Ah, would to God that we two could go away together, and be man and wife, and forget him — forget all!

MALCOLM

Even yet, Helda —

HELDA

No, no, no! You know it cannot be. We have sinned enough. Malcolm, are you *sure* no one is there?

MALCOLM

There is not a living soul in this place besides ourselves. . . . But we had best go now, dear. In another hour it will be daylight.

HELDA

Shall we go, Malcolm? It is so dark.

[He kisses her tenderly, and then goes to the fire and stirs it afresh, hurriedly puts on his clothes, goes to the door, opens it, and, staring into the dark corridor, listens intently. Helda dresses herself rapidly, and erelong glides to his side.]

MALCOLM

I will get the torch.

[Goes and returns with it lit.]

MALCOLM

Let us go. Take my hand.

[They descend the long, dark, winding stairway. The torch spurtles and goes out.]

MALCOLM

[*Suddenly.*] Who goes there?

[No answer.]

MALCOLM

Who goes there?

HELDA

[*Clinging close.*] Some one brushed past me just now! . . . Oh, Malcolm!

[Holding each other's hands they stumble on and, more by chance than foreknowledge, reach the door that leads into the court. They search awhile for the skates they left there, but in the dark do not find them. At last they are found. They go out, across the stone court, and as they go through the old ruined gate they look up. A brilliant, red light gleams through the window of the room they had been in.

Hand in hand, they hasten along the snow-banked track till they reach the loch. There they hurriedly put on their skates. In less than a minute thereafter they are flying along the black ice, his left hand holding her right.]

HELDA

Quick, Malcolm!

MALCOLM

We cannot go quicker. The snow has drifted a little here.

HELDA

Is that the wind following us?

MALCOLM

There is no wind. Make haste. We must not stop.

[After a brief interval:]

HELDA

Malcolm! Malcolm there is some one else on the loch!

MALCOLM

Impossible. Come, Helda, be brave. It will be daylight soon. In five minutes more we'll have crossed the reach, and then have only the Water of Sorrow to skate up till we come to the Black Kyle.

HELDA

It is coming this way! He — he — the skater — is coming this way!

MALCOLM

He must skate well if he overtake *us,* Helda! Come, the ice is clearer again. I see it: it is blacker than the night.

HELDA

Are we going in the right direction?

MALCOLM

Yes, yes; come on, come on!

[They fly along at their utmost speed. Suddenly Helda sways, and almost falls. Malcolm supports her, and they skate on, but more slowly.]

HELDA

[*Faintly.*] Some one passed us!

MALCOLM

[*Eagerly.*] Look yonder! I can see the shadowy ridge of Ben Malon! It is day!

HELDA

I can go no further. Oh, hold me, Malcolm.

[He takes her in his arms. She slowly recovers. Gradually an ashy grey gloom prevails to the eastward. They wait silently. Erelong they see the whole mass of Ben Malon looming through the dusk. The ice gleams like white salt in a dark cavern. Soon the loch is visible for some distance; and, a short way beyond them, the narrow mile-long reach of it known as the Water of Sorrow.]

MALCOLM

Helda, dearest, can you go on now? The night is over. . . .

HELDA

[*With a low, choking sob.*] Thank God, thank God!

[They skate on. The dawn vaguely and slowly advances. Soon they enter the frozen Water of Sorrow. The few trees along its banks are still blotches of black. Neither speaks, but, hand in hand, both sway onward as scythes tirelessly

sweeping through leagues of grass. At last they reach the end of the Water of Sorrow, and enter the Black Kyle.]

MALCOLM

In ten minutes, Helda, we'll be on Urquhar Water, and then you will be almost at home. Look behind! A white mist is sweeping along after us.

HELDA

I dare not look behind.

[With strained eyes and white, rigid face, Helda skates on, Malcolm still holding her hand. The white wreath of mist gains on them. Helda's breath comes quick and hard, but she increases her speed. Malcolm sways as he strives to keep up with her. They swing out of the Black Kyle and into Urquhar Water. A small islet looms in front of them. Dimly through the grey, chill gloom rises the rugged outlines of Urquhar. The loch forks,—one fork toward the castle; the other, and longer, to the right.]

MALCOLM

Why?

HELDA

I dare not look behind.

HELDA

[*Gaspingly.*] At last!

MALCOLM

Sst! There is some one coming down the Narrow Water!

HELDA

Quick! quick! Let us gain the islet!

[They reach it, and Helda sinks exhausted among a bed of reeds which crackle loudly. Malcolm has just time to recover his balance and to swing round, when a skater dashes from the hidden Narrow and flies across the broad and towards the islet. He sees Malcolm, and hastes in his direction, but without coming right for him. Malcolm recognises him as Martin Brooks, a groom from Urquhar.]

MALCOLM

[*Shouting.*] Ho! Martin! Martin! Stop a moment! Where are you going? Is the side-way open?

MARTIN

[*Calling, as he swerves for a moment or two.*] I can't stop, sir! I am off across the loch and through the Glen of Dusker to fetch Dr. James Graeme.

MALCOLM

What is wrong?

MARTIN

[*Shouting, with his hand to his mouth.*] In the dead o' night we heard a wild cry, but no

one knew what it was. An hour ago or less the dogs were howling through the house. . . . We found him, sitting straight up and staring at us, with an awful look on his face, stone dead. He must a' died at midnight.

MALCOLM

Who? Who?

MARTIN

[*Poising a moment, ere he swings away again.*] Archibald Graeme!

[His flying figure disappears in the gloom. The mist-wreath comes rapidly out of the kyle towards the islet. A thin snow begins to fall.]

HELDA

[*Shaken with convulsive sobs.*] Oh, God! Oh, God! Oh, God!

Qu'horribles, ces heures nocturnes!

LE BARBARE.

The Black Madonna

THE BLACK MADONNA

[The fire of the setting sun turns the extreme of the forest into a wave of flame. A river of withdrawing light pervades the aisles of the ancient trees, and, falling over the shoulder of a vast, smooth slab of stone that rises solitary in an open place, pours in a flood across the glade and upon the broken columns and inchoate ruins of what in immemorial time had been a gigantic temple, the fane of a perished god, or of many gods. As the flaming disc rapidly descends, the stream of red light narrows, till, quivering and palpitating, it rests as a bloody sword upon a colossal statue of black marble, facing westward. The statue is that of a woman, and is as of a Titan of old-time.

A great majesty is upon the face, with its moveless yet seeing eyes; its faint, inscrutable smile. Upon the triple-ledged pedestal, worn at the edges like unto swords ground again and again, lie masses of large white flowers, whose heavy fragrance rises in a faint blue vapor drawn forth with the sudden suspiration of the earth by the first twilight chill.

In the wide place beyond the white slab of stone — hurled thither, or raised,

none knows when or how — is gathered a dark multitude, silent, expectant. Many are Arab tribesmen, the remnant of a strange sect driven southward; but most are Nubians, or that unnamed, swarthy race to whom both Arab and Negro are as children. All, save the priests, of whom the elder are clad in white robes and the younger girt about by scarlet sashes, are naked. Behind the men, at a short distance apart, are the women; each virgin with an ivory circlet round the neck, each mother or pregnant woman with a thin gold band round the left arm. Between the long double line of the priests and the silent multitude stands a group of five youths and five maidens; each victim crowned with heavy, drooping, white flowers; each motionless, morose; all with eyes fixt on the trodden earth at their feet.

The younger priests suddenly strike together square brazen cymbals, deeply chased with signs and letters of a perished tongue. A shrill, screaming cry goes up from the people, followed by a prolonged silence. Not a man moves, not a woman sighs. Only a shiver contracts the skin of the foremost girl in the small central group. Then the elder priests advance slowly, chanting monotonously:]

CHORUS OF THE PRIESTS

We are thy children, O mighty Mother!
We are the slain of thy spoil, O Slayer!

We are thy thoughts that are fulfilled, O Thinker!
Have pity upon us!

[And from all the multitude comes as with one shrill, screaming voice:]

Have pity upon us! Have pity upon us! Have pity upon us!

THE PRIESTS

Thou wast, before the first child came through the dark gate of the womb!
Thou wast, before ever woman knew man!
Thou wast, before the shadow of man moved athwart the grass!
Thou wast, and thou art!

THE MULTITUDE

Have pity upon us! Have pity upon us! Have pity upon us!

THE PRIESTS

Hail, thou who art more fair than the dawn, more dark than night!
Hail, thou, white as ivory or veiled in shadow!
Hail, thou of many names, and immortal!
Hail, Mother of God, Sister of the Christ, Bride of the Prophet!

THE MULTITUDE

Have pity upon us! Have pity upon us! Have pity upon us!

THE PRIESTS

O moon of night, O morning star! Consoler! Slayer!
Thou, who lovest shadow, and fear, and sudden death!
Who art the smile that looks upon women and children!
Who hast the heart of man in thy grip as in a vice;
Who hast his pride and strength in thy sigh of yestereve;
Who hast his being in thy breath that goeth forth, and is not!

THE MULTITUDE

Have pity upon us! Have pity upon us! Have pity upon us!

THE PRIESTS

We know thee not, nor the way of the, O Queen!
But we bring thee what thou lovedst of old, and forever:
The white flowers of our forests and the red flowers of our bodies!
Take them and slay not, O Slayer!
For we are thy slaves, O Mother of Life!
We are the dust of thy tireless feet, O Mother of God!

[As the white-robed priests advance slowly

towards the Black Madonna, the younger tear off their scarlet sashes, and, seizing the five maidens, bind them together, left arm to right and hand to hand: and then in like fashion do they bind the five youths. Thereafter the victims move silently forward, till they pass through the ranks of the priests and stand upon the lowest edge of the pedestal of the great statue. Toward each steps, and behind each stands, a naked priest, each holding a narrow, irregular sword of antique fashion.]

THE ELDER PRIESTS

O Mother of God!

THE YOUNGER PRIESTS

O Slayer, be pitiful!

THE VICTIMS

O Mother of God! O Slayer! be merciful!

THE MULTITUDE

[In a loud, screaming voice.] *Have pity upon us! Have pity upon us! Have pity upon us!*

[The last blood-red gleam fades from the Black Madonna, and flashes this way and that for a moment from the ten sword-knives that cut the air and plunge beneath the shoulders and to the heart of each victim. A wide spirt of blood rains up on the white flowers at the base of the colossal figure; where also speedily

lie, dark amidst welling crimson, the motionless bodies of the slain.]

THE PRIESTS

Behold, O Mother of God,
The white flowers of our forests and the red flowers of our bodies!
Have pity, O Compassionate!
Be merciful, O Queen!

THE MULTITUDE

Have pity upon us! Have pity upon us! Have pity upon us!

[But at the swift coming of the darkness, the priests hastily cover the dead with the masses of the white flowers; and one by one, and group by group, the multitude melts away. When all are gone save the young chief Bihr, and a few of his following, the priests prostrate themselves before the Black Madonna, and pray to her to vouchsafe a sign.

From the mouth of the carven figure comes a hollow voice, muffled as the reverberation of thunder among distant hills:]

THE BLACK MADONNA

I hearken.

THE PRIESTS

[*Prostrate.*] Wilt thou slay, O Slayer?

THE BLACK MADONNA

Yea, verily.

THE PRIESTS

[*In a rising chant.*] Wilt thou save, O Mother of God?

THE BLACK MADONNA

I save.

THE PRIESTS

Can one see thee and live?

THE BLACK MADONNA

At the Gate of Death.

[Whereafter no sound comes from the statue, already dim in the darkness that has crept from the forest. The priests rise, and disappear in silent groups under the trees.

The thin crescent moon slowly wanes. A phosphorescent glow from orchids and parasitic growths shimmers intermittently in the forest. A wavering beam of starlight falls upon the right breast of the Black Madonna; then slowly downward to her feet; then upon the motionless figure of Bihr, the warrior-chief. None saw him steal thither; none knows that he has braved the wrath of the slayer: for it is the sacred time, when it is death to enter the glade.]

BIHR

[*In a low voice.*] Speak, Spirit that dwelleth here from of old. . . . . Speak, for I would have word with thee. I fear thee not, O Mother of God, for the priests of the

Christ who is thy brother say that thou wert but a woman. . . . And it may be — it may be — what say the children of the Prophet? — that there is but one God, and he is Allah.

[Deep silence. From the desert beyond the forest comes the hollow roaring of lions.]

BIHR

[*In a loud chant.*] To the north and to the east I have seen many figures like unto thine, gods and goddesses: some mightier than thou art — vast sphinxes by the flood of Nilus, gigantic faces rising out of the sands of the desert. And none spake, for silence is come upon them; and none slays, for the strength of the gods passes away even as the strength of men.

[Deep silence. From the obscure waste of the forest come snarling cries, long-drawn howls, and the low, moaning sigh of the wind.]

BIHR

[*Mockingly.*] For I will not be thrall to a woman, and the priests shall not bend me to their will as a slave unto the yoke. If thou thyself art God, speak, and I shall be thy slave to do thy will. . . . Thrice have I come hither at the new moon, and thrice do I go hence uncomforted. . . . What voice was that which spoke ere the victims died? I

know not; but it hath reached mine ears never save when the priests are by. Nay [*laughing low*], O Mother of God, I —

[Suddenly he trembles all over and falls on his knees, for from the blackness above him comes a voice:]

THE BLACK MADONNA

What would'st thou?

BIHR

[*Hoarsely.*] Have mercy upon me, O Queen!

THE BLACK MADONNA

What would'st thou?

BIHR

I worship thee, Mother of God! Slayer and Saver!

THE BLACK MADONNA

What would'st thou?

BIHR

[*Tremulously.*] Show me thyself, thyself, even for this one time, O Strength and Wisdom!

[Deep silence. The wind in the forest passes away with a faint wailing sound. The dull roaring of lions rises and falls in the distance. A soft, yellow light illumes the statue, as though another moon were rising behind the temple.

A great terror comes upon Bihr the Chief, and he falls prostrate at the base of the Black Madonna.

His eyes are open, but they see naught save the burnt spikes of trodden grass, sere and stiff save where damp with newly shed blood; and deaf are his ears, though he waits for he knows not what sound from above.

Suddenly he starts, and the sweat mats the hair on his forehead when he feels a touch on his right shoulder. Looking slowly round he sees a woman, tall and of a lithe and noble body. He sees that her skin is dark, yet not of the blackness of the South. Two spheres of wrought gold cover her breasts; and from the serpentine zone round her waist is looped a dusky veil, spangled with shining points. In her eyes, large as those of the desert-antelope, is the loveliness and the pathos and the pain of twilight.]

BIHR

[*Trembling.*] Art thou — art thou —

THE BLACK MADONNA

I am she whom thou worshippest.

BIHR

[*Looking at the colossal statue, irradiated by the strange light that comes he knows not whence; and then at the beautiful apparition by his side.*] Thou art the Black Madonna, the Mother of God!

THE BLACK MADONNA

Thou sayest it.

BIHR

[*Slowly raising himself, and resting on one knee.*] Thou hast heard my prayer, O Queen!

THE BLACK MADONNA

Even so.

BIHR

[*Taking heart because of the sweet and thrilling humanity of the goddess.*] O Slayer and Saver, is the lightning thine and the fire that is in the earth? Canst thou whirl the stars as from a sling, and light the mountainous lands to the South with falling meteors? O Queen, destroy me not, for I am thy slave, and weaker than thy breath: but canst thou stretch forth thine hand and say yea to the lightning, and bid silence unto the thunder ere it breed the bolts that smite? For if —

THE BLACK MADONNA

I make and I unmake. This cometh and that goeth, and I am —

BIHR

And thou art —

THE BLACK MADONNA

I was Ashtaroth of old. Men have called me many names. All things change, but I change not. Know me, O slave! I am the

Mother of God. I am the Sister of the Christ. I am the Bride of the Prophet.

BIHR

[*With awe.*] And thou art the very Prophet, and the very Christ, and the very God! Each speaketh in thee, who art older than they are: each —

THE BLACK MADONNA

I *am* the Prophet.

BIHR

Hail, O Lord of Deliverance!

THE BLACK MADONNA

I *am* the Christ, the Son of God.

BIHR

Hail, O most Patient, most Merciful!

THE BLACK MADONNA

I *am* the Lord thy God.

BIHR

Hail, Giver of Life and Death!

THE BLACK MADONNA

Yet here none is; for each goeth or each cometh as I will. I only am eternal.

BIHR

[*Crawling forward and kissing her feet.*] Behold, I am thy slave to do thy will: thy sword to slay: thy spear to follow: thy hound to track to thine enemies. I am dust beneath thy feet. Do with me as thou wilt.

THE BLACK MADONNA

[*Slowly, and looking at him strangely.*] Thou shalt be my High Priest. . . . Come back to-morrow, an hour after the setting of the sun.

[As Bihr the Chief rises and goes into the shadow, she stares steadily after him; and a deep fear dwells in the twilight of her eyes. Then, turning, she stands awhile by the slain bodies of the victims of the sacrifice; and, having lightly brushed away with her foot the flowers above each face, looks long on the mystery of death. And when at last she glides by the great statue and passes into the ruins beyond, there is no longer any glow of light, and a deep darkness covers the glade. From the deeper darkness beyond comes the howling of hyenas, the shrill screaming of a furious beast of prey, and the sudden bursting roar of lion answering lion.

When the dawn breaks, and a pale, wavering light glimmers athwart the smooth, white crag that, on the farther verge of the glade, faces the Black Madonna, there is nought upon the pedestal save a ruin of bloodied, trampled flowers, though the sere, yellow grass is stained in long trails across the open. The dawn withdraws again, but ere long suddenly wells forth, and it is as though the light wind were bearing over the

forest a multitude of soft, grey feathers from the breasts of doves. Then the dim concourse of feathers is as though innumerable leaves of wild roses were falling, falling, petal by petal uncurling into a rosy flame that wafts upward and onward. The stars have grown suddenly pale, and the fires of Phosphor burn green in the midst of a palpitating haze of pink. With a mighty rush, the sun swings through the gates of the East, tossing aside his golden, fiery mane as he fronts the new day.

And the going of the day is from morning silence unto noon silence, and from the silence of the afternoon unto the silence of the eve. Once more, towards the setting of the sun, the multitude comes out of the forest, from the east and from the west, and from the north and from the south; once more the priests sing the sacred hymns: once more the people supplicate as with one shrill, screaming voice, *Have pity upon us! Have pity upon us! Have pity upon us!* Once more the victims are slain: of little children who might one day shake the spear and slay, five; and of little children who would one day bear and bring forth, five.

Yet again an hour passes after the setting of the sun. There is no moon to lighten the darkness and the silence; but a soft glow falleth from the temple, and upon

the man who kneels before the Black Madonna. But when Bihr, having no sign vouchsafed, and hearing no sound, and discerning nought upon the carven face, neither tremor of the lips nor life in the lifeless eyes, suddenly sees the goddess, glorious in her beauty that is as of the night, coming towards him from out of the ruins, his heart leaps within him in strange joy and dread. Scarce knowing what he does, he springs to his feet, trembling as a reed that leans against the flank of a lioness by the water-pool.]

BIHR

[*Yearning, with supplicating arms.*] Hail, God! . . . Goddess! Most Beautiful!

[She draws nigh to him, looking at him the while out of the deep twilight of her eyes.]

THE BLACK MADONNA

What would'st thou?

BIHR

[*Wildly, stepping close, but halting in dread.*] Thou art no Mother of God, O Goddess, Queen, Most Beautiful!

THE BLACK MADONNA

What would'st thou, O blind fool that art so in love with death?

BIHR

[*Hoarsely.*] Make me like unto thyself, for I love thee!

[Deep silence. From afar on the desert comes the dull roaring of lions by the water-courses; from the forest, a murmurous sound as of baffled winds snared among the thick-branched ancient trees.]

BIHR

[*Sobbing as one wounded in flight by an arrow.*] For I love thee! I — love — thee! I —

[Deep silence. A shrill screaming of a bird fascinated by a snake comes from the forest. Beyond, from the desert, a long, desolate moaning and howling, where the hyenas prowl.]

THE BLACK MADONNA

When . . . did . . . thy folly, . . . this madness, . . . come upon thee, . . . O fool?

BIHR

[*Passionately.*] O Most Beautiful! Most Beautiful! Thee — *Thee* — will I worship!

THE BLACK MADONNA

Go hence, lest I slay thee!

BIHR

Slay, O Slayer, for thou art Life and Death! . . . But I go not hence. I love thee! I love thee! I love thee!

THE BLACK MADONNA

I am the Mother of God.

BIHR

I love thee!

THE BLACK MADONNA

God dwelleth in me. I am thy God.

BIHR

I love thee!

THE BLACK MADONNA

Go hence, lest I slay thee!

BIHR

Thou tremblest, O Mother of God! Thy lips twitch, thy breasts heave, O thou who callest thyself God!

THE BLACK MADONNA

[*Raising her right arm menacingly.*] Go hence, thou dog, lest thou look upon my face no more.

[Then suddenly, with bowed head and shaking limbs, Bihr the Chief turns and passes into the forest. And as he fades into the darkness, the Black Madonna stares a long while after him, and a deep fear broods in the twilight of her eyes. But by the bodies of the slain children she passes at last, and with a shudder looks not upon their faces, but strews the heavy white flowers more thickly upon them.

The darkness comes out of the darkness,

billow welling forth from spent billow on the tides of night. On the obscure waste of the glade, nought moves save the gaunt shadow of a hyena that crawls from column to column. From the blackness beyond swells the long, thunderous howl of a lioness, echoing the hollow blasting roar of a lion standing, with eyes of yellow flame, on the summit of the mass of smooth rock that faces the carven Madonna.

And when the dawn breaks, and long lines of pearl-gray wavelets ripple in a flood athwart the black-green sweep of the forest, there is nought upon the pedestal but red flowers that once were white, rent and scattered this way and that. The cool wind moving against the east ruffles the opaline flood into a flying foam of pink, wherefrom mists and vapors rise on wings like rosy flames; and as they rise, their crests shine as with blazing gold, and they fare forth after the Morn that leaps towards the Sun.

And the going of the day is from morning silence unto noon silence, and from the silence of the afternoon unto the silence of eve. Once more, towards the setting of the sun, the multitude comes out of the forest, from the east and from the west, and from the north and from the south. Once more the priests sing the sacred hymns: once more the people supplicate as with one shrill, screaming voice, *Have pity upon us! Have pity*

upon us! Have pity upon us! Once more the victims are slain: five chiefs of captives taken in war; and unto each chief two warriors in the glory of youth.

Yet an hour after the setting of the sun. Lightless the silence and the dark save for the soft, yellow gleam that falleth from the temple, and upon the man who, crested with an ostrich plume bound by a heavy circlet of gold, with a tiger-skin about his shoulders, and with a great spear in his hand, stands beyond the statue and nigh unto the ruins, where no man has ventured and lived.]

BIHR

[*With loud, triumphant voice,*] Come forth my Bride!

[Deep silence, save for the sighing of the wind among the upper branches of the trees, and the panting of the flying deer beyond the glade.]

BIHR

[*Striking his spear against the marble steps.*] Come forth, Glory of my eyes! Come forth, Pride of my delight!

[Deep silence. Then there is a faint sound, and the Black Madonna stands beside Bihr the Chief. And the man is wrought to madness by her beauty, and lusts after her, and possesses her with the passion of his eyes.]

THE BLACK MADONNA

[*Trembling, and strangely troubled.*] What would'st thou?

BIHR

Thee!

THE BLACK MADONNA

[*Slowly.*] Young art thou, Bihr, in thy comeliness and strength to be so in love with death.

BIHR

Who giveth life? and who death? It is not thou, nor I.

THE BLACK MADONNA

[*Shuddering.*] It cometh. None can stay it.

BIHR

Not thou? Even *thou* canst not stay it.

THE BLACK MADONNA

[*Whisperingly.*] Nay, Bihr; and this thing thou knowest in thy heart.

BIHR

[*Mockingly.*] O Mother of God! O Sister of Christ! O Bride of the Prophet!

THE BLACK MADONNA

[*Putting her hand to her heart.*] What would'st thou?

BIHR

Thee!

THE BLACK MADONNA

I am the Slayer, the Terrible, the Black Madonna.

BIHR

And lo, thy God laugheth at thee, even as at me and mine. And lo, I am come for thee; for I have made myself his Prophet, and thou art to be my Bride.

[As he finishes he turns towards the great Statue of the Black Madonna and, laughing, hurls his spear against its breast, whence the weapon rebounds with a loud clang. Then, ere the woman knows what he has done, he leaps to her and seizes her in his grasp, and kisses her upon the lips, and grips her with his hands till the veins sting in her arms. And all the sovereignty of her lonely godhood passes from her like the dew before the hot breath of the sun, and her heart throbs against his side so that his ears ring as with the clang of the gongs of battle. He sobs low, as a man amidst baffling waves; and in the hunger of his desire she sinks as one who drowns.

Together they go up the long, flat marble steps; together they pass into the darkness of the ruins. From the deeper darkness beyond comes no sound, for the forest is strangely still. Not a beast of prey comes nigh unto the slain victims of the sacrifice, not a vulture falls like a cloud through the night. Only, from

afar, the dull roaring of the lions billows heavily from the water-courses on the desert.

And the wind that blows in the night comes with rain and storm, so that when the dawn breaks it is as a sea of sullen waves grey with sleet. But calm cometh out of the blood-red splendor of the east.

And on this, the morning of the fourth and last day of the Festival of the Black Madonna, the multitude of her worshippers come forth from the forest, singing a glad song. In front go the warriors, the young men brandishing spears, and with their knives in their left hands cutting the flesh upon their sides and upon their thighs: the men of the North clad in white garb and heavy burnous, the tribesmen of the South naked save for their loin-girths, but plumed as for war.

But as the priests defile beyond them upon the glade, a strange, new song goes up from the shaven lips; and the people tremble, for they know that some dire thing has happened.]

THE PRIESTS

[Chanting.] *Lo, when the law of the Queen is fulfilled, she passeth from her people awhile. For the Mother of God loveth the world, and would go in sacrifice. So loveth us the Mother of God that she passeth in sacrifice. Behold, she perisheth, who dieth not! Behold, she dieth, who is immortal!*

[Whereupon a great awe comes on the multitude, as they behold smoke, whirling and darkly fulgurant, issuing from the mouth and nostrils of the Black Madonna. But this awe passes into horror, and horror into wild fear, when great tongues of flame shoot forth amidst the wreaths of smoke, and when from forth of the Black Madonna come strange and horrible cries, as though a mortal woman were perishing by the torture of fire.

With shrieks the women turn and fly: hurling their spears from them, the men dash wildly to the forest, heedless whither they flee.

But those that leap to the westward, where the great white rock facing the Black Madonna stands solitary, see for a moment, in the glare of sunrise, a swarthy, naked figure, with a tiger-skin about the shoulders, crucified against the smooth white slope. Down from the outspread hands of Bihr the Chief trickle two long wavering streamlets of blood: two long streamlets of blood drip, drip down the white, glaring face of the rock from the pierced feet.]

The Last Quest

Death hath not yet come unto the man who knoweth not that he is dead.

JOHANNES ARBITER: *Myst.*

THE LAST QUEST

[As in a vision . . . the furious charge through the smoke and across the corpse-strewn battlefield: the neighing and sobbing of horses; the hoarse cries, the sudden screams of men: the clang and whistle of swords: the shrill spurting of a hail of bullets: the bursting crash and roar of artillery: a wild rush, a wild onslaught, and — Victory! . . . and . . .]

And as I clomb the barren and difficult steep, I yearned for a fellow-creature, for but the hollow echo of a distant voice, even more than for escape from the twilit solitudes of this hill whereup I toiled, forgetful whence I came and knowing not whither I went. And it seemed to me as though years upon years went over me in my long, ceaseless effort; but when, with a triumph that was yet no triumph, at last I gained the crest, I still heard in my ears the fanfare of the bugles, the clash of swords, the mad rush and fury and turmoil of the charge, while my lips quivered still with the sudden scream of *Victory*.

And when I stood upon the summit, I saw that I was in a strange land. Behind me lay

a vast plain, margined afar off in the direction by which it seemed to me I had come, by obscure, impenetrable forests. Immeasurably upon this plain was ruin of ungarnered harvest. Leagues upon leagues to the east and west without end, and everywhere the grain ungathered; and nought astir save a thin dust of chaff, idly blown hither and thither by a wind that was yet too light to move the dark poppies that lay in the hollows,— too faint to bend an ear of that unlifted grain. Veiled moonlight shone upon the waste, so that even through the gloom I could see that nought moved, nought stirred: not even an owl swept with stealthy wing above the forlorn lands, not even a bat circled through the dusk, not even a cloud trailed a deeper shadow from solitude to solitude. But as I looked closer and wonderingly, and now with a great weariness of longing, I saw that every here and there the sheaves had been brought together as though the reapers had suddenly ceased from their labour and had gone to make ready for the harvesting. Yet, for the most part, the sheaves were but loosely gathered, and all untied, and with the ground near strewn with the rich grain that had, as it were, been abruptly dropped. And everywhere, far and wide, were single sheaves or small gatherings,

as though the harvesters had been weary or heedless; and often sheaves that seemed as though they had been wittingly defiled or destroyed. But now all the ungarnered harvest lay silently there in the twilight; and no man came unto that which was ready for the gathering, and no man passed by that which had been idly thrown aside or ruined in wantonness. And amidst it all, this vast harvest which stretched beyond sight to the uttermost ends of the earth, there was nothing further visible but the dark-red poppies of oblivion. Of all this immeasurable toil, of all this majesty of desolation, there was nought save a thin, vanishing dust of chaff, faint as a perishing smoke over woodlands where a fire has been, but is no more.

Then as one rousing from sleep into daylight, I turned and looked beyond me. Behold, here too was a vast plain that stretched beyond the scan of mortal eyes. The sunlight lay upon it, and it was glorious to look upon. A sweet wind came out of the blue hollows of the sky, where white clouds voyaged bearing soft rains and cool shadows: and there was so wild and glad a music of birds over the illimitable savannas of golden grain, and of young corn green as the heart of a shallow sea, that I felt as though all the joy

of my youth was upon me, and my he[art] swelled, and the blood stung in my vein[s]. But ere long I looked with amazement, for in all that unfrontiered land beyond me I saw neither man nor woman. Yet evermore, from the east to the west, swept a gigantic shadow like unto a scythe: and where the shadow swept, the grain fell. And when I looked again I beheld a mighty Shape, clothed in the dusk of shadow as with a veil, and clad with dropping decays as with a tattered robe rent by the wind. Ever and forever the Reaper strode, with blind, oblivious eyes, with vast scythe furrowing the sunlit grain: and it seemed to me, while I watched, as though the minutes passed into hours, and the hours into days, and the days into years, and the years into the timeless wastes of eternity. Looking suddenly back upon the twilit land which first I had brooded upon, I saw that its margins were as the moving tides of ocean, and that the Reaper reaped where the grain grew by the fallen grain. And there was no rest, no end to the long sweep of the shadowy scythe. Ever, forever, the scythe swept: ever, forever, the grain fell. The sun shone, the birds sang, the world smiled; and, by the margins of the Hollow Land, where the grain rose the grain fell.

Then a terror that was of life overmastered the terror that was of death, and I strained my eyes so that I might see some living thing of my own kind. But only the rays of the sun penetrated the womb of the earth, and only the endless concourse of the grain was delivered of the unwearying mother. It seemed to me, then, as though the green corn and the golden ears were but as the multitude of lives that come forth at the rising of the sun, and are no more at the setting. And as I looked with awe and terror upon the Reaper, who reaped forever and ever where the grain rose and the grain fell, I turned and stared beyond the westering sun. And lo, I beheld yet Another. A glory of golden light he seemed, clad with ever evanishing rainbows, and crowned with the auroral flames of summer dawns.

Vast was he as the Reaper; but as he fared beyond the pathway of the sun, he was as the glory and joy of eternal youth. He, too, swayed an arm, even as the mighty scythe-sweep of the Reaper, an arm of glowing light: and therewith I saw that he sowed a living seed forever and ever. As I watched the Sower in the blinding splendour of the sunlight, it seemed to me that he moved onward as he sowed; and it was with me as though

the minutes were like unto hours, and the hours like unto days, and the days unto years, and the years unto the immeasurable wastes of eternity.

Then, with a great cry, I ran down the slopes of the steep whereon I was; for my heart was fain to follow the beautiful Sower, and my soul full of dread of the Reaper that reaped forever. But when I came unto the base of the hill, and to the end of the gloomy pass that issued thence, I went no further. For over against me rose a vast wall of black basalt, and upon it, in letters of white flame, were the words of my agony. And when I read TOO SOON, I turned me in my despair, and with bitterness of grief clomb again the perilous steep.

When once more I had gained the summit, I had no heart to look where the glory of the sun fell about the Sower, sowing his living seed forever and ever. But when I looked again upon the Reaper — with mighty scythe laying low without end, without rest, where the grain rose and the grain fell — I cried aloud in my extremity of dread.

Thereafter, it seemed to me that in the Hollow Land behind me was peace. So passed I down the hill, and through the twilit waste of all that ungarnered harvest. And

there was no sound there, and nought stirred, save the slow, thin fall of the dust among the hollows forever upon the dark-red poppies of oblivion.

And I know not how long I fared, or whither; but at last, weary — weary unto death of that harvest that should never be gathered — I came nigh unto the obscure forest I had seen from the hill-summit from afar. And I was glad, for I was weary of the Hollow Land.

But when I would enter the wood, I saw that the growths were intricately drawn against yet another wall of black basalt. And as I stood, pondering, I beheld two mighty portals, and betwixt them a huge mass of marble like unto the tomb. And in great letters carven thereon were the words: TOO LATE.

The Fallen God

CHRISTIAN

. . . nay, but doth not God owe that which He hath promised?

PAGAN

He payeth in divers ways.

CHRISTIAN

Is not His glory my glory, for lo He dwelleth in me and I in Him?

PAGAN

Even so. Thus hath it ever been, O worshipper of thine own soul!

THE IDOLATER.

THE FALLEN GOD

[A vast hollow among barren hills, whereon no living thing moves or has being, and where no flower blooms, no grass or any green thing grows ever. Above the sheer slopes of the hills reaches the immense empty void of the sky, wherein there is no sun and no moon, wherein no stars mark a change that never comes, no clouds wander before the shepherd-wind that blows never.

At the far rise of the hollow — so vast that echoes from the gorge issuing at the hither end wander idly into silence ere their whispers faint midway — is a gigantic fallen altar, ancient beyond the ken of man, and prostrate as it lay even in dim antiquity. Behind it stretches to the right and to the left, and reaches upward into the lifeless sky, a sheer smooth wall of basalt, polished as ice and black as the grave. And upon this ruined, ancient altar, as upon a throne, sits the Prophet: in his eyes a woe more terrible than the desolation of the sky overhead — a terror of loneliness more awful than that of the barren hills.

All the valley — from the base of the gigantic fallen altar even unto the hithermost end, whereby all may come but none may go — is filled with an innumerable throng, so

dense that no man might pass through these close ranks. In all the valley and upon all the hills nothing stirs, nothing moves.

In the forefront of this silent concourse stand the dead kings; and behind them, rows upon rows, the high priests of the people. Even as though in one motionless stare, all look upon the Prophet, the herald of their eternal joy. And in a low, hollow voice, that yet is heard of all, as though a rumour of earthquake and awful thunder were echoing from the desolate void, the Prophet speaks:]

THE PROPHET

What would ye?

[As a sigh that goes before the autumnal wind, the dead kings speak: and the woe in the face of the Prophet passes understanding.]

THE KINGS

We are even as the dust upon the highway. O Prophet, where is our God? We would look upon him face to face.

[Looking upon them, with eyes wherein the last hope flickers unto death, the Prophet answers:]

THE PROPHET

There is no God.

[Terrible is the wail from the people, from one and from all throughout that dense throng; but silence comes upon them as

[a wave, as the priests stretch forth their arms and supplicate:]

THE PRIESTS

Far have we fared, and bitter has been the way, O Prophet of God! Lead us now to the God whom we worship, lest we perish ere he gather us to his fold.

THE PROPHET

What would ye, O blind leaders of the blind?

THE PRIESTS

Our God! Our God!

THE PROPHET

There is no God.

[Terrible is the wail from the people, from one and all throughout the dense concourse; but, as the priests stand moveless, like dumb things stricken unto the death, the multitude cries as with one voice, with arms stretched forth even as one arm:]

THE PEOPLE

We have endured to the end! We are weary; we are weary: O God!

THE PROPHET

What would ye?

THE PEOPLE

Our God! Our God!

THE PROPHET

There is no God!

[An awful whisper goes over the massed multitude:]

THE PEOPLE

Have we suffered, endured, agonized, passioned, hoped against hope, and all in vain?

[And till the Prophet speaks, a yet more awful whisper passes like a shudder over the multitude:]

THE PROPHET

There is no God!

[Then with one wild, despairing cry, all supplicate as one man:]

THE PEOPLE

Have we wrought in vain?

THE PROPHET

Yea, so.

THE PEOPLE

And there is no God?

THE PROPHET

There is no God.

[As a howl of a wild beast is the voice of the multitude:]

THE PEOPLE

Liar, liar! O false Prophet, was it ever so? Did we worship nought?

[Then, with a long sigh, as if death had come indeed, the Prophet answers:]

THE PROPHET

Nay, your God was.

THE PEOPLE

Where is he? Let us come unto him! Our God! Our God!

THE PROPHET

Behold, he is here.

THE PEOPLE

Where? Where?

[And lo, prostrate at the feet of the dead Prophet, whose eyes become as stone, and whose body as the unhewn marble in the heart of the hills, is the fallen God.

Then, as the last wave of a perishing sea, all the multitude moves onward. One by one each of that mighty company passes before the fallen altar and looks upon the dead God. And to each — kings and priests, elders and youths, women and maidens, the frail and little children — it seems as though his own self lies there, staring upward out of his own eyes.

But, at the last, none is left of all these countless thousands. Each passes, and fades as a mist against the black wall beyond.

And a great darkness comes down, though decrescent along the forefront is a dying orb, the faint, vanishing gleam whereof falls upon the stony wilderness, void as the void sky. No voice speaks; no breath moves — save only at the base of the fallen altar a perishing eddy of wind that stirs a handful of dust.]

The Coming of The Prince

"Amour! O vie! O rêve des rêves."

THE COMING OF THE PRINCE

[A great forest, at midwinter, in the North of France. The snow lies heavy on the boughs of the oaks and beeches, and upon the pendulous branches of the larches and firs. The afternoon sky is of a pale turquoise blue, faintly dulled toward the north into a vaporous grey.

In the depth of the wood, a charcoal-burner is stooping over a pile of fagots which he is binding. Suddenly he raises his head and listens intently. Far off, there is a faint strain of music. It mounts and wavers and passes away, as a feather blown from a bird in its flight sways this way and that and then drifts out of sight. The charcoal-burner resumes his labour; but, later, he once more suddenly raises his head and sniffs the chill woodland air.]

THE CHARCOAL-BURNER

It is strange. Midwinter . . . and there is a smell as of violets . . . faint . . . like those white violets in summer in the garden of the curé . . . or *(still sniffing the air perplexedly)* like those in the woods of Belamor. . . . Well, well, I know not. I have seen and heard many things. . . . Ay, and so the Sieur de Fontnoir is to have a great prince for his guest, they say. I would he might pass this

way, for I am poor — ah, so poor, and it is bitter cold — and perhaps . . . [*again he listens intently, as a faint sound of music floats through the air and lingeringly dies*] . . . It is strange!

[He gathers a few stray fagots, and then, heavily and wearily, follows a path that leads through the forest. A thin snow begins to fall: large fringed feathers swirl softly this way and that, dusking the upper air, and drawing a veil of fugitive whiteness over the tangled undergrowth. Silently, as the visionary thoughts that drift through dreams, the snowflakes fall, till the upper boughs of the firs are as vast white plumes, and a dense carpet is so thickly woven over the glades that the hare does not leap from under the frozen bracken, and under the arched roots of the old oak the yellow eyes of the fox blink drowsily.

At the northern march of the forest there is a great avenue that leads to the Château of Fontnoir; and at the far end of this, and close to the manor, Gaspard the Huntsman walks, stamping as he goes, so as to shake the snow from him. As he passes the many-gabled west wing of Fontnoir, he is hailed from an open window by Raoul, an old servitor.]

RAOUL

Gaspard! Gaspard! have you seen or heard aught of the Prince?

GASPARD

What Prince?

RAOUL

Why, the Prince whom both our Lord and the Lady Alaine have been expecting. I know no more. He may come unannounced and when unexpected, so says Father Fabien.

GASPARD

I have been in the forest all day. I met no one.

RAOUL

You saw no one! You heard nothing?

GASPARD

I saw no one except old Pierre the charcoal-burner. I heard nothing unusual — except — except —

RAOUL

Except what?

GASPARD

Within the last hour I heard twice a faint sound as of music.

RAOUL

Music?

GASPARD

Yes; I think Sylvain, from St. Luc du Lys, must be wandering hither again. I hope so: that lute of his has magic in it, and he has a voice as sweet as the spring wind.

RAOUL

I care not for your lute-players and singers. You are as bad as Sylvain, Gaspard. . . . Is it going to be a snowstorm?

GASPARD

No. This fall will soon cease. The night will be clear.

[Raoul closes the window, and Gaspard passes on and disappears into the east wing. A great silence prevails. The snowflakes fall softly, but grow thinner and more thin, and at last only a few wandering feathers drift hither and thither.

At an oriel window stand Marcel and Alaine. The room beyond is in deep shadow. To the left, a door opens on a corridor: to the right another, leading to a stone staircase that descends abruptly. The first is closed; the second is ajar. The waning afternoon light falls upon Alaine's face as the dim glow of the crescent moon on water lilies. She is very beautiful, but pale as death. Marcel is clad as though for a journey. He, too, is pale; but in his dark eyes there is a fierce flame of life.]

ALAINE

If my father knew that you were here, Marcel —

MARCEL

Let him know. I care not.

ALAINE

He hates you and your house.

MARCEL

He is an old man, who has lived with Shadows.

ALAINE

Father Fabien —

MARCEL

Alaine, what flowers have you there? It is midwinter — and yet I seem to smell the fragrance of violets.

ALAINE

There will be no violets for months yet. There are no flowers here.

MARCEL

Yes . . . violets; . . . those faint, white violets you love so well.

[The last rays of the sun stream through the upper boughs of the forest, and all the whiteness is as autumnal moonlight. The gleam illumes the face of Alaine, which is transformed to a beauty as of a summer sea. She laughs low, and in a sweet, hushed voice sings:]

White dreams,
White thoughts,
White hopes!
Shy violets.
White violets.

In woodland ways, by the brook-side,
on the hill-slopes!

Strange joy,
New thrills,
Vague fears:
Violets,
White violets,
White kisses from the lips of Spring,
white dewey tears.

White hands,
O lead me where
The white Spring strays
'Mid violets,
White violets,
On the hill-slopes, by the brook-side,
in woodland ways.

[A silence. The last glow of the sun passes. A yellow light illumines the wood.]

MARCEL

Why do you sing that song?

ALAINE

[*Dreamily.*] Because they are the flowers, the best-beloved flowers of the Prince. . . .

[*softly*]

In woodland ways, by the brook-side, on the hill-slopes!

MARCEL

Alaine!

ALAINE

Hush! Some one comes. If it should be my father — or — or — Father Fabien!

MARCEL

It cannot be your father: he is too ill to move. It is Raoul: I know his heavy step.

[Raoul knocks and opens the door. He glances, startled for a moment, at Marcel; then bows. Then, looking towards Alaine:]

RAOUL

Did you wish me?

ALAINE

No. Why do you come?

RAOUL

I heard a sound as of that little silver chime of bells that Sylvain the minstrel brought you last Noël. It was in the corridor.

ALAINE

Impossible. You are dreaming, Raoul.

RAOUL

[*To Marcel.*] Monseigneur de St. Michel, you face the great doorway of Fontnoir. Did you see any one approach? Have you stood here long?

MARCEL

No one has approached since the sun dipped among the firs.

RAOUL

It is strange. A loud peal at the door happened just as I was crossing the west gallery. I answered the summons at once; but, see you, my Lord Marcel, when I went to the door it was open, and no one was there.

MARCEL

Some one must have opened it.

RAOUL

No one could have done so unseen by me. It was not open before the summons.

MARCEL

Some one must have rung, and then abruptly gone elsewhere.

RAOUL

I looked out upon the court. There was not the faintest impress of a footstep upon the white sheet of the snow.

MARCEL

Well, it has been an illusion, Raoul.

[He crosses to the old servitor, whispers some directions in his ear, and then, as Raoul leaves the room, closes the door behind him. The yellow light over the snow-clad woods grows more wan. Beyond are broad spaces of amber, and then a vast receding vault of dusky grey, wherein three pale stars gleam icily: on the snow in the foreground rests a furtive green light.]

ALAINE

[*Dreamily.*] Ah, the sweet violets.

MARCEL

You, too, smell the violets?

ALAINE

[*Still as in a dream.*] And, said Sylvain the poet, when the Prince had made a wreath of white violets, gathered in the sunshine, but each with the moonshine dew still cool within it, he crowned himself therewith, and —

MARCEL

Who is this Prince who is coming? Why is he likely to come alone and disguised?

ALAINE

I know not.

MARCEL

Alaine, oh, my darling! I love you! Alaine! Alaine!

ALAINE

Marcel!

[Marcel sinks on his knees by her side, and wildly kisses her hand.]

MARCEL

Have pity upon me, have pity, Alaine!

ALAINE

Rise, Marcel.

MARCEL

Alaine! Alaine!

ALAINE

Rise, heart of my heart, my darling, my darling!

MARCEL

[*Springing to his feet, and holding her at arm's length.*] O my beautiful Alaine — My joy — my dream! Do you indeed love me even as I love you? No — no — that cannot be, for I worship you! O my darling, my darling!

ALAINE

I have loved you always, Marcel. But you know my father's vow — my father's hatred: he would kill you rather than —

MARCEL

And now — and now?

ALAINE

I love you, and you only, Marcel. Do with me as you will. I am a lost wave without you — a lost wave on a great sea, dark and shoreless.

MARCEL

Then farewell all this long, troubled dream!

ALAINE

Farewell this dream that is dreamt — this weary dream!

MARCEL

And you will come.

ALAINE

I come.

[He takes her in his arms and kisses her passionately. Then, silent and soundlessly, they pass hand in hand from the room by the eastward door, and descend the narrow stairway.

And as they go, the room is full, as it were, with the odour of white violets. And ere they have reached the end of the winding stairway, they stop a moment, intently listening to a faint, sweet music as of lutes, that seems to come from the room they have left.]

ALAINE

Ah, the sweet music!

MARCEL

I have heard it in my dreams.

ALAINE

. . . And I.

MARCEL

It was ever with thee, Alaine!

ALAINE

. . . And thee!

[They pass along the low stone corridor, and out behind the east wing, and into the court where Marcel's sleigh awaits them. As they sweep across the snow and into the forest, the green light passes into yellow, and the yellow deepens into orange. And, a little later, sitting by the fire in his hut, the charcoal-burner

lifts his head and smiles slowly; for he thinks he hears Sylvain the minstrel, on his way to the Château to make music for the Prince.]

The Passing of Lilith

"Connais-tu la Puissance ténébreuse qui trame nos destinées? . . . Des vies antérieures sont innombrablement présentes en moi; et je suis oppressé de mes pensées futures: je sais l'éternité. Ne suis-je l'irrévocable?"

THE PASSING OF LILITH

[The primal Eden, where the great rivers from the East and the West converge; where the winds bear abroad the rumour of the music of the young world, strange and passing sweet; where there is neither strife nor fear; where Lilith, the beautiful, soulless loveliness, reigneth supreme.

And in the serene day come ever and again the fairest of the Sons of God and do homage to her; but only to Uluel doth she yield herself. And in the serene night cometh the Spirit of this World, ofttimes in the guise of a beautiful Snake, and unto him Lilith is as flame to flame.]

THE VOICE OF THE SPIRIT OF THIS WORLD

From afar I sigh for thee, O Beauty of the World!

LILITH

[*Slowly moving through the Garden of Eden, where the dusk falleth.*] I would be alone this night.

THE VOICE

[*As the passing of the wind.*] Thy thought is my thought, and thy will is my will.

[Through the dim groves and shadowy avenues of Paradise Lilith goeth slowly, as

in a dream. She seeth not, she heedeth not the beautiful denizens of Eden: the white doe that moveth beside her awhile, like moonlight; the yellow panther, whose eyes are as emerald flames in the dusk; the green-gold cobra, languidly undulating from bough to bough; the filmy, oft-evanishing creatures of the middle air, strange and lovely shapes, opal-eyed, faintly rainbow-hued; and wandering Spirits, passing fair, flowers of the unborn fruit of the Human Soul.

And after awhile she passeth, still as in a dream, by the margins of the great, unsailed waste of waters that stretcheth westward from Paradise, vaguely hearkening, as she goeth, the prophetic murmurs of the deep.

But the sound of the waters persuadeth her to a subtle sorrow, and she wandereth inland till she cometh to the great central fountain which riseth from the womb of the earth. And looking into the heart of it, Lilith is strangely troubled.]

LILITH

[*Slowly, and still as in a dream.*] Lo, in the falling spray it seemeth that something shadowy like unto myself taketh form. Behold, now it towereth triumphantly. . . . Now it is a menacing suppliant, writhing with strange agonies. . . . Now it standeth passive, in sinister silence! And now it goeth —

it passeth — is no more. Yet, see, in the heart of the spray it cometh again!

[Then, as though aweary of the vision, Lilith turneth away, and, going through the colonnades of the forest, cometh to the great hill that is in the midst of Eden. And having gained the summit of the hill, she looketh long toward the North and toward the East, where the volcanic mountains are as a girdle of flame and falling ashes.

And a strange trouble cometh upon her, and she averteth her gaze, and descendeth the great hill that is in the midst of Eden, and passeth again into the forest; though she goeth not by the fountain, but by the starlit ways where the night-flowers exhale exquisite odours that are as dreams.]

THE VOICE OF THE SPIRIT OF THIS WORLD

From afar I sigh for thee, O Beauty of the World!

LILITH

[*Moving her lips.*] I would be alone this night.

THE VOICE

[*As the passing of the wind.*] Even as thy thought is my thought, so is thy will my will.

[As the coming of moonlight through the dusk is the voice — as from afar off — of Uluel, the fairest of the Sons of God. . . .]

THE VOICE OF ULUEL

Thou art as white fire in my heart, O Beauty of the World!

LILITH

[*Alow and at rest, upon a slope of white violets, lying as surf round the cavernous bases of vast trees.*] For I am with thee as a Dream! But come not, for I —

[A wind ariseth, and passeth.]

THE VOICE OF ULUEL

But lo! the time is at hand when —

[A wind cometh and goeth, and the voice is borne away. And there is utter silence in Eden. And Lilith sleepeth.

Hour by hour the dark blue veil of night is withdrawn, and star after star is left pale and evanescent. And when none is left to front the rose-light of the new day, save the white fire of Phosphor, that is the lamp of morning; and when a rapturous glow hath bourgeoned like a flower over the Garden of Eden; and when a Breath of Joy gladdeneth the world; Lilith awaketh. Then having listened awhile to the song of life, and drunken of the dew that lies in the chalices of the white flowers, and eaten of the golden manna that awaiteth her where she will, she smileth, and with a wild, sweet song, passeth like a dream of sunlight through the glades of Eden. And ever as she goeth, shadowy and beautiful forms like unto the souls of men follow after her:

and as she passeth beneath the trees, she ofttimes plucketh the fruit thereof, and, kissing it, giveth of the fruit now unto this one and now unto that.]

LILITH

[*Standing still, and as though listening intently.*] And if it so be —

FAINT VOICES FROM THE BEAUTIFUL SHADOWY FORMS

Give us of the fruit! Give us of the fruit!

LILITH

[*Throwing away the last fruit she pluckt.*] In the youth of the world I dreamt —

FAINT VOICES

Give us of the fruit! Give us of the fruit!

LILITH

[*Sombrely.*] And the Voice that I have heard thrice, and know not —

FAINT VOICES

Give us of the fruit! Give us of the fruit! Oh, give us of the fruit.

LILITH

[*Looking upon one of the Shadow-souls.*] What would'st thou?

THE SHADOW-SOUL

The fruit!

LILITH

Thou art a dream that is undreamed.

THE SHADOW-SOUL

The fruit — oh, give us of the fruit.

[Slowly Lilith plucketh a fruit from off the tree, and, kissing it, giveth it to the suppliant.]

THE SHADOW-SOUL

Ah, joy! joy! I am the Breath of Life! Immortal Life — Immortal Joy!

[As the Shadow-Soul eateth of the fruit, it becometh like a rosy phantom, with eyes as if filled with sunshine, and with a face like unto a sunlit sea.]

THE SHADOW-SOUL

[*Moving apart from its fellows.*] Farewell! Farewell! For I am: and ye are as dreams that are undreamed.

[And as he goeth, the wild birds of Eden hover above him, and under his feet red and white flowers spring, and a low music followeth his steps.]

LILITH

[*As in a dream.*] Farewell! Farewell! For I am: and ye are as dreams that are undreamed.

[But after the Shadow-Soul hath eaten of the fruit, the low music changeth into a mournful sighing, and the birds become like unto bats, and small, writhing snakes move where first were the red and white flowers. Then the rosy phantom fadeth

into greyness, and is no more. And nought of the Shadow-Soul remaineth, save one drop of blood which is like unto a bleeding heart, but speedily sinketh into the ground. And Lilith knoweth that before she pass that way again it will be a plant, and thereafter a tree, whereon will grow the mystic fruit wherewith unto these her worshippers she giveth life and death.]

LILITH

[*Slowly reiterating.*] Farewell! Farewell! For I am: and ye are as dreams that are undreamed.

[Slowly Lilith, passing from the trees of the fruit, with a wave of her hand dismisseth all those that follow her with the hunger that is more than bodily hunger, and the thirst that is more than bodily thirst.

Like a dream of the sunlight, she goeth through the aisles of the forest. The glory of the morning falling upon her maketh her long hair as beaten gold — as pale gold that is aflame with an inner consuming fire. Her white body is as the ivory-white lily that groweth in solitary beauty in the heart of Eden: and the going of her is as the wave that moveth before the wind upon the deep: and the light that is in her eyes of fathomless blue is as that of the azure heaven an hour before the setting of the sun.

And as she goeth, she seeth down the vast

vista of Eden the beautiful Uluel, the fairest of the Sons of God. With him are three others, each lovely as daybreak. But Uluel is as the splendour of day. And as they come nearer, the three vanish into the golden glow, and Uluel is alone. Then as a moving river of light he draweth near unto Lilith, and she seeth that the glory of his loveliness passeth knowledge. Hand in hand, they go forth together; and the innermost flower of flowers rejoiceth, and each blade of grass bendeth as with a wind. And throughout Eden there is a sound as of the laughter of life.

And while the moon prevaileth, Uluel, the fairest of the Sons of God, and Lilith lie among the lilies of the valley, where the spray of the fountain cools the air, and the shadows are deep from the great boughs of ancient trees. The joy that is their joy passeth knowledge, for Mortality is swallowed up in Immortality, as the stars that perish lie in the heart of the firmament. And Uluel, the Son of God, trembleth because of the unspeakable sin, and anon trembleth with the greatness of unspeakable joy. And Lilith dreameth.

When the day waneth in its glory, and the night, clothed with magnificence, is at hand, Uluel riseth.]

ULUEL

Lilith, Heart of Beauty, wilt thou come?

LILITH

I perish yonder.

ULUEL

Thou canst not die. Thou art immortal.

LILITH

I dreamed that I should die daily, and a thousand deaths.

ULUEL

Love scorneth fear.

LILITH

Fear warneth love.

ULUEL

Come!

LILITH

Show me the portals of thy golden house.

ULUEL

[*Troubled.*] What wouldst thou?

LILITH

Thee!

ULUEL

I must go hence. Already —

[A wind riseth, and passeth; and Lilith, lying upon the lilies alone, dreameth hour after hour. Slowly the day goeth through the gold and purple gates of the West: and the eve, with a crown of stars, cometh through the violet shadows. Through velvety glooms of darkness the night falleth, and the later splendour of the moon doth not dim the glory of the stars.]

THE VOICE OF THE SPIRIT OF THIS WORLD

From afar I sigh for thee, O Beauty of the World!

LILITH

[*With outstretched arms.*] Come unto me, O Flame of Love!

[Out of the dusk cometh a great Snake, of a beauty beyond words, and girt with a splendour like unto the wavelets of the sea when the moonlight lies upon the deep.

As he moveth, there is a sound as of a multitude of sweet lutes; as he breatheth, there is an echo of a myriad delicate strains. His voice is as the voice of the woods at sunrise, of the pastures when the day is done, of the West wind in valleys near the sea, of the rain after long drought. And Lilith giveth a low cry, and he passeth unto her.

And far away beyond the abysmal disc of the sun, Uluel singeth before God: and knoweth not that he is blind, and that God seeth, and waiteth.]

LILITH

[*Whispering to the beautiful Snake coiled about her, as the ivy is at one with the tree it claspeth.*] Yet if dreams —

THE SPIRIT OF THIS WORLD

Thou thyself art the Dream of the World.

[The moonlight spreadeth as a flood, and

the great beasts of Eden meet and rejoice with one another.

And Lilith and the Spirit of the World are at one, as two rivers that flow into one sea. The mystery and the wonder and the secret ecstasy of night enter into them, and they know the unspeakable fear and the unspeakable joy.

But toward the noon of night a strange, wild chant, surpassing sweet, draweth near. Then, with a low sigh, the Snake uncoileth from the body of Lilith and passeth into the darkness like unto the going of a moonlit river. Awhile doth Lilith list to the roaring of the wild beasts of Eden, and rejoice in their joy: but as the strange singing cometh nearer she riseth in her place, and waiteth as one who watcheth for her beloved.

Erelong issueth out of the green gloom a white company of beautiful beings, lovelier than aught else in Eden. Yet none knoweth their song save Lilith, for of all that pass by she is the mother.

And some are the offspring of her commerce with Uluel, the fairest of the Sons of God: and some are born of her dalliance with the beautiful Earth-Spirit, that is the Snake.

One by one she calleth unto them: unto the children of Uluel — Hopes, Aspirations, Fair Beliefs, Virtues, Glories, Joys, and Raptures: and unto the children of the Earth-Spirit equally fair to look upon — Desires, Lusts, Agonies, Passions, Temp-

tations, Sins, Shames, Sorrows, and Despairs.

But they, her offspring, will not abide; singing their mystic chant, one and all pass by. And when the white procession is no more, Lilith sinketh again upon the ground, and, sleeping, dreameth a dream. And in her dream she seeth how all these offspring of her joys journey unto a strange goal: and how the children of the Snake, who are as males, terribly woo the children of the Son of God, who are as beautiful female spirits.

But, in the midst of her dream, she awaketh trembling, for a Voice prevaileth through the Gates of Death and Sleep.]

THE VOICE

Arise, thou that are Lilith!

LILITH

[*Trembling.*] It is He!

THE VOICE

Arise, Lilith, Spirit of the Flesh, and go up upon the mountain.

[Thereat Lilith, rising from her place, passeth through the wood to the great hill that is in the midst of Eden. And in her heart there is the weight of the old-world dreams. As she climbeth the great hill by the light of the flaming volcanoes, her face is pale as the light on a moonless sea. And when she look-

eth forth from the summit upon the girdle of mountains, belching forever their spume of red flames and clouds of molten ashes, her heart faileth her for terror. For all the heavens — from the verge of the world to the farthest of the stars — are alive with thin spectral flames: the vital essences, as Lilith knoweth, of those innumerable worshippers of hers who through past ages have eaten of her mystic fruit. Moreover, each supplicateth wildly to the unknown God. . . .]

Give us life, that we triumph over this beautiful Evil, which hath no soul, but who is yet immortal!

[And, much troubled, Lilith descendeth the great hill that is in the midst of Eden. And at the fountain which welleth from the womb of the earth, and at the phantasm of herself in the spray thereof, she looketh long and broodingly. Thereafter, with lips muttering, but without words, and with downcast eyes, she passeth onward toward the margin of the great sea that covereth all the world to the West.

There until the dawn lieth she, silent, motionless, as one dead. And at the outburst of the glory of the rising sun, there cometh a terrible voice out of the hollow heaven:]

THE VOICE

Behold, man shall be born upon the earth. He shall inherit it. Unto the children of man is delivered thine inheritance. Hence pass thou, Lilith, even unto the great sea — thou and thine.

LILITH

[*Slowly rising.*] Even so. For my time is come upon me.

[Then knowing that her time is come upon her, and that all things must be fulfilled, she goeth forward, silent, and trembling not, but with downcast eyes, and lieth by the uttermost margin of the great sea. All day long she abideth there; nor weepeth, nor maketh any wail of sorrow; but lieth ever with her breast against the sand, and with fixed eyes staring upon the sea.

And none cometh nigh her: neither Uluel, the fairest of the Sons of God; nor the fair Snake, which is the Spirit of this World; nor any of her beautiful offspring; nor any of her shadow-worshippers, that are as the grains of sand in numbers; nor any fond beast or sheltering bird.

And at the noon of day, Lilith crieth aloud once.]

Uluel!

[And at the waning of the day, Lilith cries aloud yet again:]

Uluel!

[Slowly the fan-flame of the sun waneth above the great sea, and there is deep peace in Eden.

But ere the passing of the sun, and when all the ocean is red as with blood, the company of the offspring of Lilith by the Son of God and by the Spirit of the Earth come unto her out of Eden: Hopes and Despairs, Virtues and Sins, Glories and Shames, Raptures and Agonies, one and all come they unto her, their mother.]

THE CHILDREN OF LILITH

[*Slowly chanting.*] We are immortal, and we cannot die!

[There is no following sound, no answer, but the moaning of the sea.]

THE CHILDREN OF LILITH

[*With alien voices, passing away.*] We are immortal, and we cannot die!

[But Lilith, who hath stirred not for all their advent, only smileth constrainedly, and turneth not her staring eyes from off the deep. And the faint voices of the children of Lilith are lost in the moaning voice of the waters.]

LILITH

Beautiful Spirit, I am thine.

[But only the night cometh. And the sea moveth as though quickened into life,

and advanceth upon the land. When the moon riseth, there is nought upon the shore save a little frothing foam. In the silence of the night strange cries vibrate, and shadows innumerable pass to and fro, in the valleys of Eden.

And at sunrise God breatheth upon the dust, and Adam is.]

(1886 and 1893.)

The Lute Player

Les fibres de son cœur font les cordes d'un luth
Qui rhythme les accords des splendeurs éternelles. . . .

ISRAFEL.

THE LUTE PLAYER

[In a long, high-vaulted room, looking out upon a Roman garden where the cypresses rise in narrowing shafts from thickets of oleander and myrtle, is seated a company of men and women, feasting. Touched with the coolness of the eve that has scarce come . . . though the last floating cloudlets of crimson and pink, like petals fallen from a late-gathered rose, still linger beyond the garden-fringe of ilex and pine . . . the soft, warm air of early summer steals into the room, laden with subtle odours, and reverberant as a hollow shell with vague sounds — the hum of the bees in the mignonette, of the gnats upon the wing, of the dragon-flies as they dart to and fro above the sunken fish-ponds.]

At the head of the table, facing the open window, sits a Cardinal; beyond him on either side are men and women, for the most part young. The dancing-girls have just gone, and a sudden hush has come out of the twilight upon all assembled. A few look before them pensively, or idle with the rose leaves in the water in the crystal globes beside them; but most look towards the garden, where the

shadows are fantastically long or merged in a violet gloom.

The light in the west has become gold and purple, with a wide stretch of pale, translucent green, against which the cypresses stand black and moveless: over all the sky is one vast wave of daffodil. Out of the heart of a myrtle-thicket comes the song of a nightingale, so thrilling with exultant passion that no one dares speak or move lest the charm be no more.

When, abruptly, the song ceases, there is still silence throughout the room. But suddenly a low, penetrating strain of music floats in upon the evening air, so poignant and yet so delicate, so rare and yet with touches of such sweet familiarity, that tears come into the eyes of many. Yet none knoweth who the musician is: and if some think that the subtle playing comes from the garden, others believe that the Cardinal has secreted a lute-player somewhere in the room, or behind the tapestries or waving curtains. And to some comes a sudden sense of peace, to others a quick joy. But one youth, turning to the fair woman beside him, is startled to see that her eyes look toward him as through a veil, and that her beauty shines upon him afar off, as in a pool the fugitive light briefly lingers

while the moon rests on the mountain shoulder. With a strange dread at his heart he is about to lean forward, when he shrinks in terror, for between him and her yawns a black and bottomless gulf.

As a ripple of laughter and the sound of the wind among the grasses, goes the eager applause of those sitting at the feast; and, low and clear above all, the voice of the Cardinal, bidding the musician enter and be one of his company. But the youth shudders, for now he hears, as it were, the echo of the music floating up from the hollow blackness of the gulf. Then, with a fear such as he has never known before, he rises, and reaches forward to gather to his arms the woman whom he loves; but, even while he still hears the blithe voices of the guests, he knows that he is sinking like a falling feather into the gulf. From far beneath he hears the strange music of the Lute-player: far above, the faint echo of it among the revellers, of whom he was one but a moment ago. As a swimmer sinks down into a fathomless sea, so sinks he: and in the waning gleam overhead, as of vanishing moonlight, he sees the pale, mourning face of her whom he loves.

With a light laugh, the Cardinal calls:—

"Ah! there goes the Lute-player: I saw his

shadow fall upon the floor near the window."

And a guest cries:—

"And the nightingale has heard him too!"

Whereat there is again a profound stillness; for all sit entranced by the song of the unseen bird, which is now sad beyond words, and as though the little heart were breaking. The silence following is full of the afterthought of sweet music, as a calm sea is full of the moonlight long after a cloud-film veils the hollow sky. But suddenly, from the dusky avenues at the far end of the garden, the vanishing lilt of a lute falls upon the ears of all. So sweet and blithe its music, that each smiles as with sudden gladness and relief: none knowing what silence has suddenly come unto one of them, what horror of deep darkness, what engulfing despair.

[And the Lute-player, passing unseen down the dark ways, fares toward the city: where the noise of falling waters is sweet to tired ears, and the hot air cooled with blown spray.]

As he silently goes on his way, none knows of his presence. But as he passes by a house in an obscure street, he hears a long, wailing cry: whereat he stands still, and listens intently ere, unseen, he enters and goes towards a room where, by the bed of a child, a mother

kneels, sobbing and crying to God. In the shadow, unseen and unheard, he looks long at the woman and at the child. Then, slowly and softly, he begins to play; and the room is full of the delicate music of his lute, and upon the face of the child is an exceeding joy. And the child, with thin arms suddenly outstretched, cries eagerly:

"Mother! mother! I see a beautiful stream, all gold in the sunshine; and beyond it is a meadow full of flowers; and everywhere, everywhere, oh, the sweet songs! Oh, mother! mother! the music, the sweet music!"

And the mother pitifully cries out:—

"Yes, yes, my little one: it is but a lute-player in the street."

But as she would reach to her child, she hearkens as it were to the lute-music, floating far away above a mad rush and surge of waters: and among the screams of drowning wretches she hears a cry that goes to her heart, and at the same moment sees her child whirled on high and hurled through the swirling foam into the darkness beyond. Then, with a wild cry, she falls forward unconscious.

[In the stillness and in the shadow, the Lute-player goes forth into the street. And passing hence into a lonely and evil quarter, he plays upon his lute, but so

softly that none hears him. It is as though the blossoms on the fruit-trees were whispering to the leaves, as though the moonbeams were dancing with the ripples on a stream, as though the wandering white rays of the stars were tangled in the long grasses and made a sweet, bewildering music.

Thereafter, passing by foul places and dens of loathsome evil, the low, haunting strain wanders, wanders, drifting this way and that, as though innumerable winged spirits were floating earthward with the falling dew, singing their thin aerial song, surpassing sweet. Some hear it for a moment, fleetingly faint, behind a curtain, or in a dark passage, or betwixt the sudden opening and closing of a door. Sometimes it is a vanishing echo, sweet and joyous as of the dawn-wind stirring among the upper branches of the forest, as the rippling wash of the sea when the sunglow streams upon it: sometimes it is vague and far as the fall of snow upon the woodlands when there is no wind, as the whisper of the last breath of air swooning upon the pastures, as the faint falling music of the wild hyacinths and lilies of the valley in the hollow beyond the blown spray of the waterfall.]

And passing down a narrow street, the Lute-player comes upon a man going cau-

tiously in the shadow: who, fearful of following steps, turns, muttering hoarsely:

"Who art thou?"

But hearing from the Lute-player that he is only a wandering musician faring waywardly through the city, the man cries blithely:—

"What do you sing? For I know where a good song will be welcome!"

Whereupon the Lute-player answers simply:

"I sing of Life . . . and Death."

With a challenging voice the man says:—

"Come, a song for a song!"

And he begins a carol of life and the many joys thereof, and mocking at death:—

O Day come unto me,
Fair and so sweet!
Crown'd shalt thou be,
And with wing'd feet,
Escape the invading sea,
Whose bitter line
Follows o'er fleet.
What joy thou would'st is thine:
Life is divine,
O Fair and Sweet!

Death is a paltry thought:
A little troublous thing—

An insect's sting!
Beautiful Day, oh, heed it not!
Death is a vain, a —

But he ceases abruptly as the Lute-player suddenly touches his lute: and so passing rare is the music that the man stands entranced. Nor does he speak any word or make any gesture, as he hears it lessening and vanishing.

[In the deep shadow of the street the Lute-player is seen no more, and the thrilling, evanishing strain passes away at last, sweet as faint inland echoes heard longingly through the dusk at sea.]

With a low sigh the man turns, but suddenly reels with horror to see that he is in a city of flame, and that the street before him is a broad and fathomless river of blood. As, with a terrible cry, he falls therein, he does not see the figure of his enemy behind him, nor feel the long knife of the assassin that transfixes his heart.

[And the Lute-player, traversing the city, crosses one of the bridges that span the immemorial river whereon it is set. Halting midway, he looks broodingly upon the slow-moving flood whose gurgling current washes the piers beneath him. Once, smiling darkly, he raises his hand, about to play a music so wild and strange that the whole city should hearken: but,

with a sigh, he forbears. As he moves, he descries in the opposite embrasure a woman, young and fair but for the haggard weariness of her face, stooping, and staring steadily at the water in its dull, monotonous flow. Softly he touches his lute to a delicate, distant melody: exquisite vibrations as though of long forgotten strains, of loved sounds and voices.]

Once, with a strange, reluctant fear, the girl turns; but seeing him not in the shadow, and thinking herself alone with the murmuring water, looks no more. So subtly soft and sweet is the music stealing upon her ears, that it is as though it came from afar. Hearing it, she smells again the wild roses and the honeysuckle in the hedges; listens to the bees lazily fumbling among the red and white clover in the hot pastures, to the faint wind astir among the flowering beans, to the lowing of distant cows, to the haunting call of the cuckoo above the woodlands where a sleepy murmur comes from the cushats' nests. But, listening entranced, the haunting strains come to her at last not from afar, but from below, deep from the heart of the flood flowing onward for ever and ever. Suddenly a great trembling comes upon her: and in a low voice she cries:—

"Who is there?"

As from among the grasses she hears the sound of small feet running, and of a soft, low laughter. Springing downward with a cry, she hearkens to the strange music, ringing in her ears wildly sweet: but as the dark waters overwhelm her, she knows nought save a horrible choking as of a suffocating child, the fierce execrations and blows of a man, and a fearful, fathomless gulf into which she is sinking as a stone into the abyss.

[For long, and as though wearily, the Lute-player leans upon the bridge. The wash of the water and the sough of the night-wind alone break the stillness; yet it is to him as though with their undertone are wrought remoter harmonies of earth and sky, wherein also the moonlight and the far icy stars and the wandering clouds have utterance.

When, at the last, veiled in shadow, he passes on, the dawn breaks. Erelong the opal of the east is haloed by great fan-like streamers of gold and crimson: and those looking upon the morning star see beneath it the unfolding of the splendour of the Flower of Day. The boatmen on the long barges and moored sloops upon the river hear for a moment the echo of a sweet, a blithe sweet song: and the peasants trooping through the fields listen intently to catch again the happy lilt of delicate strains heard afar: and upon

the hills the shepherds look upward, with hands shading their eyes, half startled by faint vanishing cadences of joyous music. The birds sing, and the flowers bloom, and the winds unfold their wings and fare forth in the sunshine. Everywhere, everywhere, the joy and glory of life. And the Lute-player, clothed with a radiance of sunlight and with eyes of morning, moves onward through the glad noon, playing ever his wild, sweet song: for unto him is no night and no day, and unto him no morrow comes for whom all morrows are but strains remembered from an antique song.]

The Whisperer

THE WHISPERER

I

[A summer noon, in a crowded thoroughfare of London. The sunlight slants through a thin veil of blue, and becomes a pale gold on the street, where the endless surge of the traffic is as the waters of the sea caught in a narrow strait. Among the hundreds who hurry this way and that goes a man who looks beyond him as though he descried somewhat afar off for which he yearned. Sometimes he stops abruptly, and with startled eyes stares at the man or woman at that moment by his side: sometimes he speaks, though none answers him.]

THE MAN

[Stopping abruptly, in his rapid walk eastward, while the light wanes from his eyes.]

Who spoke?

THE WHISPERER

It is I.

THE MAN

Who art thou?

[Silence.]

THE MAN

[*Turning first to one person moving past him, then to another.*] What is it?

[Each stares for a moment, but none answers. All whom he addresses hurry on without regarding him: a few glance at him and mutter irritably or scornfully. Slowly he resumes his way. Again the voice is in his ear.]

THE MAN

Who spoke?

THE WHISPERER

It is I.

THE MAN

Who art thou?

THE WHISPERER

I am of Those who watch.

THE MAN

For whom?

[Silence.]

THE MAN

For what?

[Silence.]

THE MAN

Art thou here?

THE WHISPERER

I am here.

THE MAN

I see thee not: where art thou?

THE WHISPERER

I am in the rhythm of the whirling wheels and the falling hoofs, in the noise of innumerous feet, and the murmur of myriad

breaths. The sparrows flicker in the light of my footfall, and the high sunlight is in my eyes.

THE MAN

What would'st thou?

THE WHISPERER

I have no will, O falling wave. It is I who say: what wouldst thou?

THE MAN

Where am I?

THE WHISPERER

In a vast maëlstrom in a vaster sea.

THE MAN

Am I then a lost wave?

THE WHISPERER

A rising and a falling wave.

THE MAN

[*Reiterating below his breath.*] A rising and a falling wave!

THE WHISPERER

A falling and a rising wave.

THE MAN

Art thou a spirit?

[Silence.]

THE MAN

What art thou?

[Silence.]

THE MAN

[*Turning desperately to an old man at his side.*] It is thou! Speak, speak!

[The old man looks at him fearfully, shakes off his grasp, and hurries onward.]

THE WHISPERER

I am here.

THE MAN

If I am of those for whom you watch tell me to what end?

THE WHISPERER

That, if thou wilt, when thou art ready, thou may'st hear and see.

THE MAN

Thus be it. I would hear, and see.

[Even as he speaks, the Man sees the crowd in the street become trebled: and in his ears is a noise of crying and lamentation, with vague remote shouts of victory and defiance. Like unto the innumerable falling of the waves upon the sea is the dim, confused rumour of the strife of human passions, embodied in shadowy shapes, with wild eyes of hope, dread, wrath, horror, and dismay. Beside each man or woman moves two others, the phantom of the soul and the phantom of the body. And ever the phantom of the soul, with its eyes of morning glory, looks through the veil of flesh into its fellow, now dulled or sleeping, now weary or heedless, now listening intently, now alive and eager. And ever the phantom of the body moves a little in advance of its fellow, and weaves a glamour

before the eyes, and sings a wildering song into the ears, and laughs low because the flames of fire that are its feet seem like roses, and the dust and ashes upon its head are as fragrant lilies, and the dropping decays wherewith it is clad wave like green branches that lure to the woodland.]

THE MAN

[*Shuddering.*] Everywhere the Evil One has his triumph.

THE WHISPERER

There is no Evil One.

THE MAN

But he — the phantom of the body, who weaves his charm of the grave and his rune of corruption —

THE WHISPERER

Look!

[And the Man, looking, sees only one figure moving beside each human being of all the hurrying myriad.]

THE MAN

Who — who is it?

THE WHISPERER

It is the phantom of the man or of the woman.

THE MAN

Are they, then, one: the phantom of the soul and the phantom of the body?

THE WHISPERER

They are one.

THE MAN

[*Terrified.*] And thou?

[Silence.]

II

[Under a chestnut tree, on a grassy place, near a cottage, in the remote country. There is no moon, but its radiance comes diffused through soft, filmy clouds. In the darkness, the Man stands, listening intently.]

THE MAN

I am not alone?

[Silence.]

THE MAN

I know thou art nigh. It is on the wind, on the leaves, in the grass.

THE WHISPERER

I am here.

THE MAN

The time is come. Tell me that which thou art — show me that which thou art.

THE WHISPERER

Look!

[And the Man, looking, beholds for the first time the flowing of the wind. As he looks, the heavens open, and the flowing of the wind is from the starry depths, and is filled with a myriad myriad aerial

beings,— souls coming and going, fair spirits, shadows and shapes innumerable, strange and sometimes terrible.]

THE MAN

[*Awestruck.*] What are thou?

THE WHISPERER

I am the rhythm of the sap in the grass and the trees, of the blood in all living things, of the running of waters, of the falling of dews and rains, of the equipoise of oceans, of the four winds of the world, of the vast swing of the Earth.

THE MAN

Thou art the God of this world! Thou art God! Lo, I worship thee!

THE WHISPERER

Behold!

[And the Man, looking, beholds through the mist of stars a whirling grain of sand, falling forever through the waste eternity of Oblivion.]

THE WHISPERER

That whirling grain of dust is the World of which thou hast spoken.

THE MAN

Thou art no other than God, the God whom all races have worshipped since Time was!

THE WHISPERER

Behold!

[And the Man, looking, beholds amid the

depths of the stars a vast Shape, seated on a golden sun among the Pleiades, who swings forever, as a lamp of incense, the Seven Stars, and with them all the stars and planets and suns and moons of the universe: and as he swings this Lamp of Incense, he sings a song of praise and worship to the Most High.]

THE WHISPERER

Behold, thou hast seen thy God, and the God whom all the races of the world have worshipped since time was. And now, turn thine eyes upon the glory of Him yet again.

[And the Man, looking, beholds another grain of sand whirling forever through the waste infinities of Oblivion.]

THE WHISPERER

That whirling grain of sand is the vast universe of the sun and moon and stars that thou knowest, and all the suns and planets and stars eye hath seen or the brain conceived.

THE MAN

[*Scarce whispering.*] And God?

THE WHISPERER

Thou canst not see the invisible speck that was His throne. Behold the grain of sand that was His universe.

THE MAN

Who art thou?

[Silence.]

THE MAN

[*In his soul.*] Is there nought beyond?

THE WHISPERER

Verily: the nearer foam of the Sea of Life.

THE MAN

Doth God live?

THE WHISPERER

Beyond the extreme horizon of the Sea of Life, Gods and Powers and Dominions bow down before the Most High.

THE MAN

And then?

THE WHISPERER

The Sea of Life begins.

THE MAN

[*Despairingly.*] Beyond all thoughts to find Him — all prayer to reach Him!

THE WHISPERER

Nay, He is here.

[The Man, bewildered, stares around him as the moon sails from out the last films of mist. In his hand is a blade of grass, that he had not plucked.]

THE MAN

[Vaguely repeating.] *Nay, He is here!*

THE WHISPERER

I am thine to serve, O spirit that dieth not.

THE MAN

Who art thou?

[Silence.]

William Sharp

And I remain thus, dreaming, listening to that interminable dialogue between the heart that desires and the reason that reprehends, going from hypothesis to hypothesis, like a blind bird casting itself incessantly against the four walls of its cage.

L'Irrémédiable.

PART II

Madge o' the Pool

The Gypsy Christ

The Lady in Hosea

Madge o' the Pool

MADGE O' THE POOL

A THAMES ETCHING

I

When the January fog hangs heavy upon London it comes down upon the Pool as though it were sluiced there like a drain, or as a mass of garbage shot over a declivity in a waste place. The Pool is not a lovely spot in winter, though it has a beauty of its own on the rare days when the sun shines in an unclouded frosty sky, or when a north-wester comes down from the distant heights of Highgate and Hampstead, and slaps the incoming tide with short splashes of waves washed up by the downward current, till the whole reach of the Thames thereabouts is a jumble of blue and white and of gleaming if dirty greys and greens. On midwinter nights, too, when the moon has swung up out of the smoke, like a huge fire-balloon adrift from the Lambeth furnaces, and when the stars glint like javelin points, there is something worth seeing down there, where the forest of masts rises sheer and black, and where there is a constant cross-flash of red

and green rays from innumerable bow lamps and stern windows and tipsy lanterns trailed awry through the rigging. A mile up-stream, and it is wonderful what stillness prevails. For ever, of course, the dull roar of omnibuses and cabs on the bridges, the muffled scraping sound of hundreds of persons moving rapidly afoot: from the banks, the tumult of indiscriminate voices and sounds of all kinds round and beyond the crank-crank of the cranes on the grain-wharves and the bashing of the brick and coal barges against the wooden piers. But upon the interspaces of the river, what comparative silence! A disjointed passenger-boat, with spelican funnel darting back to the perpendicular, shoots from under a bridge, and paddles swiftly down-stream like a frightened duck; a few moments, and it is out of sight, swallowed in the haze, or swung round a bend. A trio of barges, chained to each other like galley-slaves, passes up-stream, drawn by what looks like a huge blue-bottle-fly. The bluebottle is a tug-boat, a "barge-bug" in river parlance; and as it flaps the water with a swift spanking smash of its screw, the current is churned into a yeast of foam that is like snow against the bows of the first barge, and thin as dirty

steam when washed from the sternmost into a narrow vanishing wake. As likely as not, the bargees are silent, pipely contemplative, taciturn in view of always imminent need for palaver of a kind almost unique in the scope and vigour of its blasphemy. Perhaps, however, the boy at the caboose forward whistles the tune of "O were I sodger gay," or that perennial favourite which recounts the deeds of Jack Do and Bob Didn't in the too familiar groves of Pentonville; or the seedy man in shirt-sleeves, who walks the starboard plank with a pole and thinks he is busy, may yell a ragged joke to a comrade similarly employed on one of the other barges. Or even, and indeed very probably, the heavily cravated, dogskin-capped helmsman may suddenly be moved to a hoarse volley of words so saturated, dominated, upheld, overborne by the epithet "bloody," that the "coal-bunker" might almost be taken for a slaughter-house escaping in disguise. But even the barges slump up-stream out of sight before long: and then, how quiet the river is for a space! The wharf-rats are so fat that they make a stone-like splash when they plunge through the grain-dollops; but only a practised ear could recognise the sound in the rude wash of the current, or "spot" the

shrill squeaks, as of a drowning and despairing penny-whistle, when a batch of these "Thames-chickens" scurries in sudden flight down a granary-slide and goes flop into the quagmires of mud left uncovered by the ebb. But at the Pool there is never complete silence. Even if there be no wind, the curses of the Poolites (in at least twenty varieties of human lingo) would cause enough current of air to crease the river's dirty skin here and there into a grim smile.

Like the rest of the world, the Pool has its sociable seasons. Broadly there are two. The shorter might be called that of the concertina and open-air "flings"; the longer that of the riverside singing-dens and dancing-saloons. But the regular population has not much time for systematic gaiety, not even in the long summer nights: a bad season, in fact, when there is little business to be done and too much light to do it in. The stranger visiting the neighbourhood — that is to say, the stranger who carries in his aspect too obvious credentials as to his respectability — might laugh at the idea of there being a Pool population at all, that is, of a permanent kind. He will find the saloons in the locality haunted by a motley gathering, where as a rule the ladies show no insular partiality in

their acceptance of partners, whether in the dancing-shops or other dens of more or less repute; and where, without having had the advantages of an excellent training at a young ladies' academy, they seem quite at ease with gentlemen of foreign parts, coloured or otherwise, who talk no lingo but their own. It is, in fact, a cosmopolitan society. The civilisation of the West and the wisdom of the East meet constantly in the intercourse of the Irish dock-labourer and the Chinese "grubber"; and the coolie or Malay is as much at home as the Dutchman or Portugee.

There is a clan of which almost nothing is known. It is the people of the Pool. Ask the river-police, and they will tell you something of the "water-rats," though if your informant be candid he will add that he can't tell you much. Many unfortunate travellers have met members of the fraternity; for one of their favourite and most reputable pursuits is the ferrying at exorbitant prices (the inevitable purloining skilfully carried on at a certain stage is not charged for) of would-be voyagers by the Hamburg and Baltic steamers, when, on account of the tide, embarkation has to take place at midstream. The Poolites haunt Irongate and Horsleydown

stairs, and are given to resenting active interest in their vested rights. But their chief means of life is otherwise obtained. They are the vermin of the Thames, and they scour its surface by night with irreproachable industry and thoroughness. It would not be easy to describe what they do, particularly under cover of mist or fog; it is simplest to say that they will do *anything*, except speak to a "cat" or refuse a drink. A "cat," it may be observed, is the name applied to a member of the river police; and as the "cats" are always worrying, even when not directly chasing the Poolites, or "rats," the result is incompatability of temper.

Many of the Poolites haunt holes and corners in the neighbourhood of Horsleydown stairs. Some have their lair in old boats, or among rotten sheds or wood-piles; others are as homeless, and as unpleasant and as fierce, as dung-beetles. Among them there are "rats" of either sex who are practically never ashore, whose knowledge of London is confined to familiarity with the grim river frontages, and whose sole concern in connection with "the great name of England" is a chronic uneasiness about her might and majesty in the guise of the police.

A score or so of Poolites are marked men.

That is to say, either through length of experience in loafing and vagabondage, or owing to proved crime, their names are known to the "cats," and their persons occasionally wanted. An invincible modesty characterises the Poolite. He sees no distinction in public arrest, and the halo of a conviction does not allure him. In a word, he is a water-rat, and wishes to remain one.

The fact that he was so well known, and could easily be found, was a chronic sore in the drink-besotted mind of Dick Robins. He loathed this distinction, and could he have gained prolonged credit at any other gin-shop than that of his brother Bill he would have shifted his quarters. The fact that, as a younger man, twenty years earlier, when he was about thirty, he had thrice served his term in jail, may have prejudiced him against any radical change in his way of life. On the second occasion he had appropriated in too conspicuous a fashion the contents of a pocket, that of the wife of a sea-captain with whom he had found it difficult to come to an exorbitant arrangement; and for this very natural action he was condemned to three years' imprisonment, with atrocious and objectionable hard labour. He would have

been embittered against the law to the end of his days, if he had not been so far mollified by the light sentence on his third "go," one of six weeks,— thus light, as the charge was only of having brutally kicked his wife up and down a barge and then into the half-frozen Thames. As she died of rheumatic fever, Mr. Robins could not legally, of course, be held accountable. For twenty years or more Dick Robins had found gin so pleasing a mistress that he had been unable to give any but the most nominal attention — it would be absurd to say to the education — to the growth of his daughter. Her name was "girl": that is, his name for her. Baptized Margaret, she was commonly called Madge. He realised that she was a girl, and comely, on account of various ideas of his own, and suggestions from outside, all on the same level of profound depravity. He first regarded her as a woman when, having lost eleven and fourpence at Wapping-euchre to Ned Bull, that gentleman generously offered to overlook the debt, and to spend the remaining eight and eightpence of the broken quid in two bottles of "Jamaicy" and four goes of "Aunt Maria," conditionally on receipt of Madge as the legal Mrs. Bull. The offer would have been accepted right off, but

Mr. Robins found to his chagrin that the bottles of rum and goes of proof-gin would not be consumable till the marriage festival.

Madge was a dark, handsome girl, tall, well-made though too thin, somewhat slatternly in dress, though generally with a clean face, and, stranger to say, with fairly clean hands. Neither she nor any one else would have dreamed of the application to her of the term "beautiful." Only those who caught a glimpse of her as she stood in a statuesque pose, pole in hand, on some hay barge or hoy in ballast, or as she sculled up stream or down, deft as a duck in the fen-tangle, noticed the beauty of her thick-clustered, ample hair, and mayhap the splendour of her large, dark, velvety eyes. Madge knew very little of shore-life, even that of the Horsleydown neighbourhood, and nothing at all of the larger life of that vast metropolis which represented the world to her: though she was vaguely aware that beyond the Isle of Dogs the Thames widened to that sea which bore the foreign ships which came to London, and brought so many mariners of divers nationalities, all equally eager for two things, strong drink and purchasable women. When ashore, she was generally at the house of her uncle Bill the publican, or,

more often, at that of her sister-in-law, Nell Robins. For all her rough life, her rude imaginings, uncouth surroundings, her ignorance of refinement in speech or manner, Madge was pure of heart, honourable in all her intimate dealings, and as upright generally as she had any call to be.

Dick Robins was coarse and brutal enough in his talk when she had refused to desert the river-life of the Pool in order to act as barmaid at her uncle's public-house, the "Jolly Rovers." With all her experience — and she could have given points to most specialists in blasphemy — she learned the full vocabulary of utter degradation when she told her father that "Gawd hisself couldn't swop her to that beast, Ned Bull, without her will, which would never be till she was drownded, and not then."

The drink-sodden brute went so far, even before he violently struck her again and again, that, though he confirmed her in her abhorrence of the proposed union, he was the first great reforming force in her life. After *that,* she realised, she might "dry up." Foulness of speech could go no further. A disgust of it all came upon the girl. She prayed an unwonted prayer to that mysterious abstraction God, whose name she heard as often as that

of the police, that she might have strength to refrain from all ugly horrors of speech, except, of course, such acknowledged ornaments of conversation as "bloody" and "damn."

Yet no, not quite the first, if the most immediate, reforming influence. She had already incurred the wrath and contempt of the Horsleydown and Irongate mudswipes, by her attitude towards Jim Shaw, a despised and hated "cat," a river policeman. He had saved her from drowning, on an occasion when the most obvious help lay with her own people, not one of whom, boy or man, had bestirred himself. "Water-rat" though she was, and acknowledged foe as was every "cat," she was so little at one with her kindred as to be able to feel grateful towards her saviour, particularly as he was so good-looking a deliverer, and possessed, in her eyes, a manner of ideal grace and dignity.

It was on a dirty, foggy, December afternoon that Dick Robins had tried, through a flood of blasphemy and obscenity, to drift his meaning alongside the wharf of the girl's mind. When he found that she would have none of it, was a rebel outright, he followed curses with blows, till at last, wild with rage and pain, Madge rushed from the low tavern whither her father had inveigled her. Nat-

urally she made straight for the river. Having sprung into a dingy, she sculled rapidly amid-stream. She had no idea what she was going to do. To get quite away from that horrible street, from that drink-den, from that human beast who called himself her father — that was her one overmastering wish.

An unpleasant fate might easily have been hers that night, had she not fortunately broken an oar. The swing of the current caught the boat, and in a moment she was broadside on. A wood-barge and a collier were coming down, and a large steamer forging up-stream, and there she jobbled helplessly, right in their way, and almost certain to be crushed or swamped. All the girl's usual resourcefulness suddenly left her. She realised that she was done for, a thought at which not she only but her youth instinctively rebelled.

Suddenly, *slump — slump — splash* — came the wood-barge almost upon her. She saw a pole thrust forward to stave the dingy off from too violent a concussion; and the next moment some one was over the low side and in the boat beside her. She recognised Jim Shaw, as in a dream.

"Here, I'll pull you right," he said roughly; "hand me that oar." While sculling from the stern-rollock, he told her that he had been

up-stream on duty, and had been given a lift down again by his friend, the owner of the barge "Pride of Wapping"; that he had seen her predicament, and, as the distance narrowed, recognised her face; and that "there he was."

Madge thanked him earnestly, and remarked, incidently, that "it *was* a bloody near squeak." She saw him look at her, and glanced back with a new, vague apprehension.

"You're a pretty girl, Madge, and a good girl, I believe,— too good to use that rot. Wy, blast me, if I 'eard a sister o' mine use that word 'bloody' so free permiskuous, I'd let her know — damme if I wouldn't!"

"*Have* you a sister, Mr.— Mr.— Shaw?" asked Madge curiously, and not in the least offended.

"No, nor no mother, neither; but I had 'em. Look here, Madge, I'm a lonely chap, an' I've took a fancy to you — did that time I hauled ye out o' the Pool — and I'll tell you wot: you cut old Robins and all that gang and be my gal!"

Madge turned her great eyes upon him. He thought she was scornful, or mayhap only reckoning up the actual and possible advantages of the connection. She, for her part, was taken aback by what seemed to her his

splendid chivalry and the refined charm of his address.

"Now then, lass, say yes or no, for we'll be along o' the Irongate in a jiffy, an' some o' your lot's bound to be there."

"I'll be your gal, Jim Shaw," was all she said, in a low voice.

Shaw thereupon gave the oar a twist, and kept the boat mid-stream for a hundred yards or so below Irongate wharf. When nearly opposite a small floating quay marked No. 9, he sculled alongside. Ten minutes later he had obtained leave of absence for the night, and then he and Madge went off together to hunt for lodgings.

For the next few days Madge was fairly happy. She would have been quite happy if she and Jim could have seen much of each other; but it was a busy time with the river police, and he could not get away at night. He returned to their room between six and eight in the morning, but had to sleep till well after midday; and as he had to be on duty again by six, sometimes earlier, they had not much time for going anywhere together. But, in truth, Madge cared little for the entertainments they did go to. The painted, tawdry women offended her in a way they had never done before; the coarse jokes of the men did

not strike her as funny. She was dimly conscious of a great change in herself. Physically and mentally she was another woman after that first night alone with Jim. She was his "gal," and would be the mother of their "kid" if she had one; but it was not the obvious in wifehood or motherhood that took possession of her dormant imagination, but something mysterious, awful, even sacred. The outward sign of this spiritual revolution, this new, solemnising, exquisite obsession, was a complete cessation from even such customary flowers of speech as those above alluded to; and, later, a more scrupulous tidiness. What joy it was when Jim told her one morning that he was to have Boxing-day as a complete holiday! At last the heavens seemed opened. He proposed all manner of wild and extravagant trips: a visit to the inside of St. Paul's or the Tower, so familiar externally to both — a visit to be followed by an omnibus-trip through the great city to that home of splendour, Madame Tussaud's, or even to the Zoölogical Gardens, the monkey-house in which had made on Jim's boyhood-mind an indelible impression of excruciating humour. The wildest suggestion of all was a triple glory: the Tower and St. Paul's, then far away to the gorgeous delights of the

Crystal Palace, and at night to the Pantomime at Drury Lane.

But in great happiness the mind sometimes resents superfluity of joys. In deep love, as in deep water, says a great writer, there is a gloom. The gloom, in the instance of Madge, arose from her profound weariness of the streets and the house-life, her overmastering longing for the river. If an angel had offered her a boon, she would have fulfilled a passionate dream by becoming a female member of the river police, and being ranked as Jim Shaw's mate.

When Jim realised what was in the girl's mind and heart, he good-naturedly, though not without a sigh, gave up his projects, and bestirred himself to please Madge. One suggestion he did make: that they should get "spliced"; but Madge thought this a waste of time, money, and even welfare; for she vaguely realised that she had, and probably would continue to have, more hold over Jim as her "man" than as her legal husband. "It might be better," he remarked once meditatively.

"But why? don't I love you?" was Madge's naïve and unanswerable reply.

By Christmas Day all was arranged. Jim knew the captain of a river steamer who had

promised to take them as far as Kew. Thence they were to go by rail to Windsor, to show Madge those two marvels, where the Queen lived, and "the real country"; then they were to leave in time to catch the ebb-tide below Richmond, and go down-stream on a friend's hoy, the *Dancing Mary,* all the way to Gravesend. Madge would thus see the country and the ocean in one day, and yet all the time be on the river. The project was a mental intoxication to her. She was in a dream by day, a fever by night. Jim laughingly told her that he would be blowed if he would ask for another holiday soon.

A memorable day, indeed, it proved. Madge's education received an almost perilously rapid stimulus. Long before dusk she had won for herself, besides a little rapture, a new pain that would henceforth be a constant ally, and perhaps a tyrant.

The beauty even of the winter riverscape affected her painfully. That great stillness, that indescribable calm, that white peace, that stainless purity of the snowy vicinage of the Thames near Windsor, was an overwhelming reproach upon life as she knew it, and upon herself. She was conscious of three emotions: horror of the past, gratitude to Jim, her saviour and revealer, and a dumb sense

of the glory of life as it might be. But at first she was simply overcome. If she had not feared how Jim would take such folly, she would have screamed, if for nothing else than to break the silence. He had his pipe, merciful boon for the stagnant spirit and the inactive mind; she had nothing to distract her outer from her inner self, nothing to ease her from the dull perplexity and pain of that incessant if almost inarticulate soul-summons of which she was dimly conscious. More than once, even, a great home-sickness came upon her; a bodily nostalgia for that dirty, congested, often hideous, always squalid life, to which she had been born, and in which she had been bred. Once, at a lowly spot, where the river curved through snow-clad meadows, with an austere but exquisite beauty, she was conscious of a certain relief when she and her fellow-passengers were collectively swept by a volcanic lava-flood of abuse from an infuriated bargee, horrible to most ears that heard, but to her coming as inland odours to tired seamen, subtly welcome as it was in its appealing home-sound.

She was affected as profoundly, if not so acutely, by the voyage down the lower reaches of the Thames beyond the Pool. Windsor

itself had not greatly impressed her. It was too remotely grand.

When, late that night, the hoy anchored off Gravesend, and through the darkness came up a moan, a sigh, a tumult as of muffled steps and stifled whispers, the voice of the sea, Madge, almost for the first time in her life, was troubled by the thought of death. The night was dark, without moon, and the stars were obscured by drifted smoke and opaque films of mist. An easterly wind worried the waves as they came slap-slapping against the current, and there was often a sound as of irregular musketry. A steady *swish-swish* accompanied the now flowing tide, or the way of the wind. The salt chill that came with it made the girl's blood tingle. She longed to do something, she knew not what.

They had two berths to themselves, screened so efficiently as to give them all the privacy of a bedroom. They were very happy after their long wonderful day; but what with happiness, many pipefuls of tobacco, and liberal gin, Jim soon fell asleep. Madge lay awake for hours. It was a boisterous night seaward. The reach of the Thames estuary thereabouts was all in a jumble. The wind, surging overhead, had a cry in it foreign to any inland wail or city scream.

Madge listened and trembled. The sound of the sea calling: it was a revelation, a memory, a prophecy, a menace.

II

Next day, Madge learned what she had expected, that her voyage down-stream had been duly noted by her kindred. She knew them well enough to regret that she and Jim had not kept out of sight, at any rate, from London Bridge to the Isle of Dogs. Jim laughed at her fears, but warned her to hold her weather-eye open, and, in particular, to avoid the Pool.

This, unfortunately, was just what Madge could not do. She had the river-water in her blood. Jim might as well have put a mouse near a cheese and told it to stay beside the empty bread-plate.

Gradually she became a more and more frequent visitor to her old haunts. It was commonly understood, Irongate-way, that Madge had gone off with some seafaring chap, but was getting tired, or perhaps was not finding the "rhino" quite so free. On the other hand, her secret was known where she would fain have had it unguessed. She had a good deal to put up with. The female Poolites had nasty tongues; the males of the species, whom

she had kept at bay before with comparative ease, believed that they might now have a turn. An unspoken but not less dreaded ban lay upon her on the part of her own people. Now and again she saw Ned Bull, and the savage lust in the man's brutal face, gleaming from its hatred and revengeful malice, sent all her nature into revolt. He caught her one day on Horsleydown stairs, and at once leered at her in devlish fashion and taunted her. She swung round and struck him full in the face.

The next moment she was in the water. When a sympathetic bystander had hauled her out — sympathetic in the sense that he wanted to see Bull "give the gal her change" in full — the man strode up and hissed in her ear:

"I'll knife that bully-rip o' yourn as sure's I'm death on 'cats;' ay, an' wot's more, I'll 'ave you as my gal yet."

"Ay, Ned Bull," answered Madge, in a loud, clear voice, while her great eyes flashed dauntless defiance, "that you will when the Pool's run dry, an' I'm squeaking like a rat in the mud; but not afore that, s' 'elp me Gawd!"

After this episode Madge knew that she would have to be doubly on her guard. Ned

Bull was not a man to have as an enemy, particularly as he knew well where to strike the only blow she really feared. As it happened, her fears ultimately proved to be only too well-grounded; though some months passed in apparent security.

The only one among all whom she knew who had remained loyal to her was a girl called Arabella Goodge, to whom she had once done a prompt service. The girl had sworn that she would never be content till she had proved her gratitude, and she meant it. The opportunity came at last.

Late one afternoon in June, just six months after her union with Jim, Madge was astonished to hear herself asked for at the door of her lodging. "Is this wheer Jim Shaw's gal lives?" was not tactful, perhaps, but it was unmistakable. Madge recognised the voice, and was eager to see one whom instinctively she knew to be a herald of good or evil; yet she could not but enjoy a delay which involved so personal a passage of arms as that which took place between Mrs. M'Corkoran, the landlady, and Miss Goodge. Ultimately Miss Goodge was announced into the presence of "Mrs. Shaw, an' Mrs. James Shaw at that, an' be damned t' ye?"

The girl came — and at what risk to herself

no one could better know than Madge — to give warning of a plot. If the fog held, two boats of "rats" were to lie in wait that very night, and run down the *Swiftsure,* a particularly obnoxious "cat-boat." Of course Miss Goodge would not have troubled to track down and visit Madge merely to tell her an interesting item of news; only it happened that Jim Shaw was "stroke" in the *Swiftsure.*

Madge realised the peril at once. She thanked Arabella cordially, and then set off for Jim's station. The news was doubly welcome to Jim; it meant promotion probably, as well as the excitement of a fight and of turning the tables.

The upshot was, that a boat with three or four dummy figures was at the right hour set adrift through the fog just above the appointed spot. The bait took. The collision took place, and Jim Shaw's dummy in particular suffered from concussion of the brain from an iron crowbar as well as from submersion in the river. The "rats" had scarcely realised how they had been befooled when the *Swiftsure* was upon them. There was a rush and a struggle. The Pool-boat was upset, and each of the late occupants speedily nabbed, with the exception of Ned Bull — an exception which Jim Shaw regret-

ted personally for obvious reasons, and officially because that individual was particularly wanted at headquarters, and his capture meant for the captor approval, and possibly promotion by the powers that were.

Nevertheless, practical approval came. True, the crew of the *Swiftsure* were individually and collectively called "duffers" for having let Bull escape, when at least they might have hit him on the head with an oar: though to this Jim Shaw replied, and of course was backed up by his comrades, that Ned Bull must have sunk and been carried off in the undertow. A drowned Ned Bull was not so satisfactory as a caught Ned Bull; but still the fact was one for congratulation.

What most concerned Shaw was his promotion a grade higher. The superintendent who informed him of this rise further hinted that the young man was looked upon favourably, and that he might expect to get on, if he kept acting on the square and was diligently alert for the wicked.

On his way home next morning, eager to tell Madge the good news, Jim pondered on how best to celebrate the occasion. Suddenly an idea occurred to him. Promotion and prospects have a stimulating effect on ethical conceptions. Jim decided, firstly, that he

would make Madge his legal wife; secondly, that he would forgive his enemies and invite old Robins and Will of the "Jolly Rovers," and Bob Robins and his wife, and make a day, or rather an evening, of it. This, he was sure, would give Madge a position and importance which she could not otherwise have, while it was almost the only way (except the convenient if perilous one of double-dealing) to remove, or at least to modify, the resentment which Madge had incurred. Madge was delighted with his news. It meant another day, sometime, up the river; another night, Gravesend way, within sound of the sea; and, moreover, Jim could now carry out his fascinating projects in connection with Madame Tussaud's and the Crystal Palace. To the question of the marriage ceremony she preserved an indifferent front. If Jim really wished it, she, of course, was willing; if he didn't, it was equally the same to her. The girl, in fact, was one of those rare natures to whom the thing was everything and the symbol of no moment. But she was seriously opposed to Jim's Christian charity in the matter of the proposed wedding party. She loved his sentimental weakness, but, with her greater knowledge of ineradicable depravity, she thought that the honour

of her father's company might be dispensed with. She yielded at last to the suggestion as to her brother Bob and his wife, with a stipulation as to Arabella Goodge, but disparagingly combated the claims of her uncle. Being a woman, however, having begun yielding, she yielded all. Before Jim went off to the river that night, the marriage-day was fixed, and it was decided that, at the subsequent party at the aristocratic river-side tavern, the "Blue Boar," the company of Jim and his groomsman, Ted Brown, and of Madge and her bridesmaid, Arabella Goodge, was to be further graced by Mr. Dick Robins (if sufficiently sober), Mr. and Mrs. Robert Robins, and Mr. William Robins of the "Jolly Rovers."

The marriage was to take place three weeks hence, as Jim was to get his long-promised holiday for a week, from the morning of Saturday the 18th of July till the evening of Friday the 24th. What a week this was to be! Three days of it was to be spent in the remote and wild country of Pinner, of which suburban locality Jim was a native, though he had not been there since he was a small boy. His aunt owned a small sweet-shop and general stationery business there, and would receive him and his bride for the slack days,

Monday till Wednesday. As for the other days, the proposals of Madge were wild, and those of Jim fantastically extravagant. The young man was more in love with Madge than ever, having the sense to see that she was one among a hundred or a thousand. Their life together had been a happy one for both. It was Jim, however, and not Madge, who took a pleasurable interest in the fate of the child whose birth was expected in September.

It was on the 15th of July, just three days before the projected marriage, that Madge was startled, or at least perturbed, by an urgent message brought to her by a pot-boy from the "Jolly Rovers." Her father was ill, dying, and wanted to se her at once.

Madge was neither hard-hearted nor a cynic, but it was with perfect sincerity that she remarked, *sotto voce,* "I'll be blowed if I'll rise to that fake." Later, however, something troubled her. A new tenderness, if also a new weariness, had come to her ever since she became daily and hourly conscious of the burden she bore within her. She was so much an unsullied child of nature, despite all her discoloured and distorted views of life, that this mystery of motherhood had all the astounding appeal of a new and extra-

ordinary revelation. Jim's child and her's! The thought was strange and quiet as that winter landscape she had seen once and never forgotten; though at times as strangely and overmasteringly oppressive as the silence of the starry sky, seen through the smoke or lifting fog, or above the flare of the gas-lamps in the street.

The result was that she set out for Plum Alley, off Thompson's Court, the trans-riverine home of her father, when he was not at the "Jolly Rovers" or elsewhere. On the way she called at the station to see Jim, but heard, to her surprise, that he was on special duty Horseleydown-way. She muttered that she might perhaps come across him, as she was just going there herself, a remark which the superintendent heard disapprovingly. "Shaw's out on ticklish business, my girl," he said, kindly enough; "and it would be better if you were to keep out of his way: better for us, better for him, and better for you." All the same Madge, as she went on her way, hoped she might at least get a glimpse of Jim. Since the *Swiftsure* incident she had never felt at ease when Shaw was on special duty. She was aware that Ned Bull, even if he was not drowned, had left a legacy of hate and revenge.

The July evening was heavy and sultry. The air was as though it consisted of a poisonous cloud of gin-flavoured human breath, with rank odours of divers kinds. In the narrow courts and alleys near the river the heat was stifling. The thunder, which all the afternoon had growled menacingly round the metropolitan skirts beyond Muswell Hill and Highgate, had stolen past the eastern heights of Hampstead and crawled through the murky gloom of the town till it rested, sulkily brooding, from Pimlico to Blackfriars.

As Madge crossed the river, and stood for a few minutes to look longingly at the water, she noticed first that the tide was just on the turn of the ebb, and next that a thick, sultry fog, scarce less dense than a typical "London mixture," was crawling stealthily upstream from Shoreditch and Wapping. She was thinking of Jim, and was rather glad that he was on shore-duty.

When at last she reached Plum Alley, she found, somewhat to her surprise, that her father really awaited her. On the other hand she saw at a glance that his "sudden illness" was a "fake."

Dick Robins, however, did not give his daughter time for an indignant retreat, much less for reproaches.

"Look 'ere, girl," he began hoarsely, "your brother Bob's in trouble, an' you're the only blarsted swipe as can 'elp 'im. S' 'elp me Gawd, this yere is true, ev'ry word on it, an' no fake. Wot? eh? W'ere is 'ee? Wy, 'ee 's down China Run way. 'Ee's waitin' there. Waitin' for wot? Wy, blarst — I mean, 'ee's awaitin' fur the stranger. Wot stranger? Wy, the stranger as you've to run down through the fog to the Isle o' Dogs."

Hoarse explanations, with remonstrances on the part of Madge, ensued, but at last she both understood and agreed. She had been brought up in full recognition of that cardinal rule that many things have to be done in life without knowing the why and the wherefore. She believed in the present emergency, and understood why the task of conveying the stranger down-stream could be intrusted to no Poolite under a cloud. She was to go down to the sadly miscalled Larkwhistle Wharf, where she would find a boat in charge of a man. In the stern would be the "bundle." She was not to speak to this "bundle" on any account, and was not to worry "it" with curious looks. She was to row down-stream till off Pig Point in the Isle of Dogs, and wait off-shore till another boat joined her, and relieved her of her

freight. The man, a friendly lighterman, would act as look-out and bow-pilot.

"Wot about the weddin', father?" said Madge, somewhat reluctantly, as she was about to leave.

Mr. Robins put down the bottle of "Aunt Maria," from which he had just taken a hoarse gurgling, salival swig.

"Oh — ah — to be sure — wot about the weddin'! Ha, ha! Well, I'm blarsted if I know if my noomerous parlyhairymentary dooties"— hiccough and choke —"yes, by Goramity, I'm bl . . ."

Madge did not wait to hear any more. She had done her duty so far, and the sooner the rest of it was fulfilled the better content would she be.

She could not leave, however, without a parting shot. Dick Robins heard her voice as she vanished downstairs: "Remember, father, if you and 'Aunt Maria' come together on Saturday, you won't be allowed in!"

When she reached Larkwhistle Wharf she was perspiring heavily. The brooding thunder overhead, the stagnant atmosphere, the airless, suffocating fog, made existence a burden and action a misery. Movement on the water, however, promised some relief.

There was no one on the wharf, nothing beside it except a boat in which a muffled figure crouched in the stern-sheets, with a tall man seated upright in the bow. This was her boat, clearly.

As she stepped across the gunwale, Madge started and trembled. For a moment she thought she recognized in the silent, surly lighterman, no other than Ned Bull; but when she saw that he looked away, indifferent so far as she was concerned, and noticed that his hair was black and curly, and that he had a long beard, her sudden suspicion and fear lapsed into mere uneasiness. As for the other passenger, he was evidently determined to betray himself neither by word nor by gesture.

In silence, save for the occasional splash of an oar and the steady gurgling wash at the bows, Madge rowed the boat down-stream. Thrice she was unpleasantly conscious of the hot breath of the lighterman upon her cheek; at the third time, and without looking round, she quietly asked him to keep a steady look-out in front of him, as in such a fog an accident might occur at any moment.

At last she guessed that she was off the Isle of Dogs. She was glad. Not only was she exhausted with the heat and labour, but

somewhat anxious now about the condition of the boat, a rotten tub at the best. It had begun to leak, and the chill, muddy water clammed her ankles. Suddenly, through the fog, she heard the lighterman give a peculiar double-whistle. Almost immediately afterwards a boat, rowed swiftly by two men, shot alongside.

The next moment the lighterman was aboard the new-comer. Once seated, he leaned over, and, whispering hoarsely to Madge to row straight on, after turning the boat's bow shoreward, told her that as soon as he came to a pier she was to let the other passenger out. The man had scarce finished speaking before he and his companions became invisible in the mist.

Madge was again alarmed. The voice, surely was the voice of Ned Bull. She could have sworn to it, and yet —?

Wiping the sweat from her forehead, and pausing on her oars for a moment to listen to the distant moan and billowy hollow roar of the thunder, which had at last broken its brooding silence, she noticed suddenly that the leakage was rapidly becoming serious. The water was high above her ankles, and was swiftly rising. A gurgling sound behind her betrayed where the danger lay. The

boat had been plugged, and the plug had just recently been removed!

Barely had she realized this when the dingy raked up against a jagged spike, and began to settle down.

She knew it all now, all except the mystery of this taciturn, moveless stranger. So, Ned Bull was to have his revenge. But the need of prompt action brought all her energies into play. "Now then, you there," she cried angrily to her mute fellow-passenger, "you've got ter move if you don't want to fill yer boots wi' bottom-mud. We're sinkin', d'ye 'ear? . . . Drat the bloomin' cove, 'ee's asleep! Hi!"

But here there was a lurch and a rush of water. The boat collapsed, as though it were a squeezed sponge.

No sooner had Madge found her breath after her submersion than she struck out towards and made a dive for her companion, who was evidently unable to swim, and was fast drowning.

A minute later she had grasped him by his rags. She was conscious at the same moment of a red light piercing the gloom: the bow-light of a barge-bug churning sputteringly against the current and towing a half-empty hoy up-stream. She gave a loud cry

for help, and then another that was more like a shriek. The second was the result of a discovery that she had just made. The body in her grip was not that of a living man, nor even of a man who had just died. It was a corpse, stiff and chill.

The shock terrified her. For a moment she believed that she had been made accessory to some foul murder. She let go of the hideous bundle of rag-clothed flesh she was upholding as best she could. Another moment, and the corpse would have been sucked under and swept down-stream: a vague instinct made Madge suddenly reach forward and grip the body again.

The lights of the tug and the green and red lanterns of the hoy now streamed right upon her. Weighted as she was with her soaked clothes, and the burden of her close on seven month's motherhood, she struggled not only to withstay the current, which fortunately was sweeping her steadily towards the hoy, but to keep the corpse from sinking until at least she could see it clear. Still, the strain was too great, and she was just about to let go, when a broad ray of light flashed full athwart the dead face.

It was that of Jim Shaw, her husband.

For a moment the world reeled. Death

called to her out of the windy darkness overhead, out of the rushing river, out of the sea-reaches beyond; Death sang in her ears, and held her body and soul as in a vice; Death was in her heart, in her brain, on her lips, in the dull glaze of her staring eyes.

Suddenly a mad rage swept her back into the tide of agony that was life. With a swift gesture she raised the head of the corpse, and stared wildly into the lightless, unrecognising eyes. The wash of the water and her grasp had loosened the rags in which Jim had been disguised, and she saw the purple bruise and gaping knife-thrust-wound through which his young life had gone.

With a long, terrible cry of despair Madge let go of the body of her beloved, and herself sank back into the water as a dying woman, after a last flicker of life, might fall back into the pillows. If all had occurred a little earlier or a little later, she would have been drowned then and there, and have suffered no more.

The man at the helm on the tug-boat caught sight of her, and yelled to the man at the bow of the hoy. The bargeman missed her, owing to the rapid slush and surge of the churned water alongside; but his comrade at the stern caught at the swirling clothes with

a bill-hook, and in a few minutes Madge was lying unconscious on the deck of *The Golden Hope*. Her rescuers had seen nothing of the row-boat, nor even of the body to which she had clung; but they strained their eyes and ears lest any other unfortunates should be in need of succour.

It was fortunate for Madge that there was a woman on board. The wife of the master of *The Golden Hope* was not like so many of the Poolites, merely a female, but a woman.

In the middle of the night, just before the break of dawn, a man-child was prematurely born into the world, in the stuffy deck-house of the barge. It was born dead: "an' a precious good thing too, drat it for its impertinence in a-coming where it wasn't wanted," as Mrs. Hawkins of *The Golden Hope* philosophically remarked. She had understood at once that the new-comer was not born in lawful wedlock. Had the little one lived, had it even been born alive and breathed feebly for a brief season, the good woman would not only have lamented its decease, but would have kept close to the letter of the law. As it was, she had a hurried colloquy with her husband, a circumlocutory argument to the effect that the poor young mother might as

well be saved all the shame and trouble, and perhaps worse.

Mr. Peter Hawkins listened gravely, nodded once or twice in an uninterested way, spat once cautiously, then again meditatively, and finally, emphatically. He left the deck-house, and in a minute or two returned with a large and heavy brick.

The dawn broke as *The Golden Hope* entered and passed through the Pool. A soft, tender wave of daffodil light blotted out the eastern stars. The rigging and masts of the vessels at the docks and in the river became magically distinct, and the red and yellow lanterns flared gaudily. Here and there a green lantern-light danced along a narrow surface of dark water fast turning into a hue of slate. A dull noise came from the city on either side, though London seemed asleep.

On the river there was silence, save for an indiscriminate grinding noise from a large Baltic screw steamer, timed to sail at sunrise; and, on a China tea-clipper, a Malay singing shrilly, with fantastic choric variations of a strange, uncanny savagery.

As the barge slump-slushed through the deepest part of the Pool, a small package was dropped overboard. It sank immediately. This package was, in the view of Mr. and

Mrs. Hawkins, a cold little body with a heavy brick tied round its feet; to its mother, who had just returned to full consciousness, the burial was as that of her own joy, her own life.

Madge was much too weak to move, even if kindly Mrs. Hawkins had hinted that her absence would be preferable to her company. The woman had taken a fancy to the poor lass, with her great eyes filled with grief and despair, with at times, too, a wild light which looked like passionate hate.

She had had a talk with her husband, and had decided to keep Madge with then till the barge reached Sunbury, where she had a sister, who in the summer months kept a small tea and ale house for her own benefit and the refreshment of cheap trippers and wayfarers. There she would leave the girl for a time, in the care of Polly 'Awkins. If Madge could pay for her keep, so much the better; if not, why then o' God's grace she and Polly betwixt them would provide for her for a bit till she could look round.

And at Sunbury in due course poor Madge was left. She had become a different woman in the few days which succeeded the death of Jim and the premature birth and loss of the child of their love. A frost had come

over her youth. She was so still and strange that, at first, good, kindly, superabundantly stout Miss Hawkins was quite awed by her. The woman's generous kindness at last broke down the girl's reserve, and the whole story was confided to her. There was something so romantic in it to Polly Hawkins, the very breath of wild romance indeed, that, for all her disapproval and misapprehension of Madge's action in the matter of a legalised union, she was completely won over. Never, even in the *Family Astounder* or the *West End Mirror*, monthly parts or old bound volumes of which she was wont to pore over in the winter nights, had she come across anything that stirred her so much. But she passed from her high vicarious excitement into something resembling the emotional state of a participant in a tragedy in real life, when, one wild rain-swept evening late in August, all the bitter pain and agony and passion of Madge's ruined life broke out in revolt.

She had only one wish now, she declared, only one object: to be revenged on her father, and, above all, on Ned Bull. She was no longer a girl with a heaven of happiness ahead; she was a wrecked woman, with a choice between going to pieces on the breakers or being engulfed in a quicksand. Since all was

ruin ahead, was she to surrender everything, to go tamely hence, a victim with no will or power of retribution? No, she swore, as with flashing eyes and erect figure she moved to and fro in the kitchen parlour, she would not be content till she had made her father pay *her* for his crime, pay with his life, and till she saw Ned Bull swing on the gallows.

Miss Hawkins realised that Madge was in earnest — passionately, insanely in earnest; and she trembled. She had come to love the girl, and though her departure would be a loss both to her and her pocket (for Madge had communicated with Jim's comrades, who had raised a handsome subscription for her when they found that officially nothing could be done), she would not otherwise be ill at ease. But now — now it would be to let a murderess loose. Why, some day it would all be in the papers. A prospective persual of certain headlines brought out a cold perspiration upon her neck and forehead: "'Orrible Murder in the Docks," "Last Confession," "Execution of Madge Robins," "What did the Bargee do with the Baby?" "Testimony of Polly Hawkins," and so forth.

Miss Hawkins rose, looked at Madge in fear and trembling and deep admiration, all merged in a profound and loving pity. But

she had not the gift of expression, and all she could say was: "My dear, 'ave some black-currant cordial."

Madge, however, understood. The tears broke out in a flood from her eyes, and with sobs and shaking frame she threw herself in the arms of her friend.

The following day was Sunday. As much for distraction as for any other reason, Miss Hawkins persuaded Madge to go with her to church. Madge had never been in a church, and for the first part of the service she was too shy and bewildered to understand, much less to enjoy, what she saw and heard. The singing soothed her, and some of the prayers left haunting echoes in her brain. The clergyman was that rare individual, a fervent Christian and a perfectly simple man, who did not fulfil his priestly duties perfunctorily, but as though he were a wise and loving gardener watering the precious flowers of a strict but beloved Master. She followed, or cared to follow, very little of what he said; but his earnestness impressed her. Through all his discourse sounded, like a wild moan and wail of the sea-wind, the words of his text: "Forgive us our sins, as we forgive our enemies." "Then shall we be together with the Lord," were the last words she heard the vicar utter,

before the congregation rose at the benediction.

In discussing the matter later with Miss Hawkins she did not gain much enlightenment. Miss Hawkins said that religion was meant to be took like gin, with a good allowance of water. "It didn't do to take things just as they were spoke. Vicars an' sich-like were paid same as other folks, an' their business was to deal out salvation dashed wi' hell-fire.

"My dear," she added, "there's nary a man livin', be he a vicar or only a Ranting Johnny, who doesn't promise us more of both one and the other than there's any need for."

Madge did not sleep much that night. She was vaguely troubled. The fire of her wrath burned low; and though she heaped coals of remembrance upon it, the flare-up was a failure.

At breakfast next morning she asked Miss Hawkins abruptly if she had heard the vicar say, "Forgive us our sins, as we forgive our enemies," and, if so, what she thought of it.

Miss Hawkins finished her tea. Meditatively she scooped out the sugar and slowly refilled the cup.

"Not much," she said.

The rest of the meal was taken in silence.

The day was so glorious that Madge wandered forth into a field near the river, unwittingly elate with returning youth and strength, and quick to answer to the sun's summons to the blood and the spirit.

She lay for a long time through the noon heat, instinctively revelling in the flood of sunshine. The sky was a dome of deepening blue, flecked with a few scattered grey-mare's-tails; the meadows were flush with the second hay and autumnal wild-flowers. Beyond her feet the river swept slowly by, the golden light falling along its surface and at once transmuted into silver and azure; while at the margins the over-hanging trees threw a cloud of flickering green shadows into the moving movelessness below.

It was almost happiness to lie there so quietly, and watch the swallows swooping to and fro, the cows standing knee-deep in the shallows and flapping lazily their long tails, the purple dragon-fly shooting from reedy pool to pool. For the time being, the agony of remembrance was dulled.

More and more Madge perplexed herself by pondering over what she had heard in church. She had never felt as she had to-day. There was a new peace, a new hope almost, in her troubled mind, though it had not

yet taken definite form. The strange and baffling concourse of her thoughts, however, left her weary. The whole ebb and flow found expression, perhaps, in the sole words she spoke aloud:

"No, that I can't: I can't make much of it. But I do see that going back to that hell of life at the Pool, even wi' letting my father be, an' knockin' out the knifin' o' Ned Bull an' leavin' 'im, as the parson says, to Goramity, is not the way to get alongside o' Jim again, let alone that babby wich he'll 'ave 'igh an' dry sure as dixey."

It was nigh upon sundown before Madge clearly saw her way of salvation. "She'd got to die somehow"; but all her instincts were in revolt against that inevitable transference to the earth which would be her fate if death came upon her at Polly Hawkins's or any other house. "She couldn't abide the land: she knew *that*: not for all the blessedness of it ten times over."

Shortly before sunset she descried a boy going along the Sunbury towpath. She called him, and for sixpence he readily agreed to write a pencilled note at her dictation and thereafter deliver it to Miss Hawkins.

When the boy was gone Madge waited a little while. She watched the sun grow large

and red, and fall through the river-haze into the very middle of the river-reaches higher up. Then she found herself listening intently to a corncrake calling hoarsely close by through the tall wheat.

It seemed so little to do, and after all so little even to say farewell to.

A brief while after sunset a great red and yellow hoy, with a tattered brown sail outspread aloft to catch what breeze there was that would help the slow current, came heavily down-stream. It was laden with rye, and the man and boy on deck were drowsy with the heat and labour of the day. Neither of them felt the slight shock when the dilapidated bow-keel caught upon some obstruction.

It was late that night when the *Lively Nancy,* in tow of a fat, unwieldy little barge-bug, slumped heavily through the jumble in the Pool. There was a heavy slashing, criss-cross of water above, and, below the surface, a serpentine twisting and dovetailing, with vicious downward suction. The tide was running up like a mill-race; the river-current and a high westerly wind tore their way seaward.

In this fierce conflict the bent keel of the *Lively Nancy* was at last cleared of its obstruction.

For an hour or more thereafter, till the river police discovered it, a woman's body was tossed to and fro in the Pool, idly drifting and bumping against the slimy piers, along the gaunt, deserted wharves.

The Gypsy Christ

THE GYPSY CHRIST

CHAPTER I

There are, among the remote uplands of the Peak district, regions whose solitude is that of a wilderness. Over much of the country there is a frown. When fair weather prevails, though these lofty plateaux are seldom wholly free from cloud-shadow, this frown is merely that of a stern man, preoccupied with sombre thoughts. When there come rain and wind, and still more the dull absorbing gloom that floods out of the east and the north-east, the frown is forbidding, minatory even, at times almost tragic. Viewed anywhere from High Peak to Sir William, these uplands are like the sea. They reach onwards, lapse, merge into each other, in a similar succession of vast billows: grand as they, as apparently limitless, and, at times, as overwhelmingly depressing.

The villages are scattered, insignificant; built of dull, grey stone: gardenless, flowerless. The people are uncouth in speech and manner: cold, too, as the stone of their houses, and strangely quiet in the ordinary expression of emotion.

In all regions where the wind is the paramount feature in the duel between man and the powers of nature, as upon the seas and great moorland tracts, it is noticeable that human voices are pitched in an unusually low key. In remote islands, upon mountains, on the billows of hill-land that sweep up from the plains and fall away in dales and valleys, on long flats of grass, fen, or morass, and upon the seas, the human voice takes to itself in time a peculiar and, to those who know the cause, a strangely impressive hush. Here, it is as of men subdued, bitter even, for ever gloomful.

No land is so dreary as to be without redeeming beauty. The hill region of the Peak, that most visited, at any rate, has singular charm. The dales are famous for their loveliness, their picturesqueness; the heather slopes for their blithe air; the high moors for their wide perspectives, their clear windy breath, their glory of light and shadow. Nevertheless, there are vast districts where nature, and man, and the near way and the wide prospect, and the very immensity of the environing sky are permeated with the inner spirit of gloom, as the cloud-caravans of July with their burden of thunder.

There are reasons why I do not wish to be

explicit topographically, in what I am about to narrate: indeed, no one from what I write could find the Wood o' Wendray, or the House o' Fanshawe. It must suffice, that what I have to tell occurred in the remotest, perhaps the grandest, certainly to me the most impressive region of the Peak-Land.

Far among these uplands—at the locality alluded to, from twelve or fifteen hundred to two thousand feet above the sea—there is an almost trackless morass, called Grailph Moss.

The name is by some supposed to be a corruption of "grey wolf": for here, according to rumour, the last wolf in England had its lair, and might have been living still (for the huntsmen aver that the grey wolf lives three hundred years!) but for its audacity at the time of the Great Plague. Packmen and other wayfarers have alleged that on wild nights of storm, or in even more perilous seasons of mist or marsh-fog, they have seen a gaunt shape leap towards them from a dense clump of heather or from behind a juniper, or have heard, behind or in stealthy circuit, terrifying footfalls as of a huge dog.

Grailph Moss comes right upon an old disused highway. Along this road, at far intervals, are desolate hamlets: in all save the

three summer months, apt to be isled in the mist breathed from the myriad nostrils of the great Fen. At these times, the most dreadful thing to endure is the silence.

Not far from one of these hamlets, and somewhat more removed from the contagion of the Moss: high set, indeed, and healthy, if sombre of aspect save under the fugitive bloom of the afterglow, or where redeemed by the moonlight to an austere beauty,— is a strange house, the strangest I have seen anywhere.

The House o' Fanshawe, it is called in the neighbourhood: though what is perplexing is that the name is centuries old, though for generations no family of that name occupied the Manor of Eastrigg: nor is there any local legend concerning a Fanshawe, or record of any kind to account for the persistency of the designation.

Long before my friend, James Fanshawe, took the Manor, ruin had come upon the middle as well as the northern portion. In fact, the southern end, which had been the original Elizabethan house, was scarce better, and had been preserved at all only because of its fantastic, often beautiful, and always extraordinary roof and wainscot carvings. These were none the less striking from the

fact that they were whitewashed. Many were in a fashion suggestive of the arabesques of Barbary, such as are to be seen to this day in the private houses of the rich Moors of Tlemçen or Tunis. Others recalled the freaks of the later Renaissance imagination: and some were of Gothic rudeness and vigour. But the most extraordinary room of all was a small chamber opening from a large vaulted apartment. All the panels on three sides of the room, and the whole roof, were covered with arabesques of the Crucifixion: no one whitewashed carving quite like any other, though all relentlessly realistic, sometimes savagely, brutally so. The fourth side was of varnished black oak. Against this, in startling relief, was a tall white cross, set in a black stand; with a drooping and terrible figure of the crucified God, the more painfully arresting from the fact that the substance of which it had been wrought had been dyed a vivid scarlet, that, with time, had become blood-red.

A word as to how I came to know this house in this remote and desolate region.

Two or three years ago, when wandering afoot through Croatia, I encountered James Fanshawe. There is no need to narrate what

led up to our strange meeting — for a strange meeting, in strange circumstances, and in a strange place, it was. It will suffice for me to say that our encounter, our voluntary acquaintanceship, and our subsequent friendship, all arose from the circumstance that each of us could, with more justice than some who have done so, claim to be a Romany Rye — which is not exactly "a gentleman-gypsy," as commonly translated, but rather an amateur-gypsy, or, as a "brother" once phrased it to me, "a sympathising, make-believe gypsy." There are some who can talk the dialects of "Little Egypt," or at least understand them, and many who know something of the folk-lore, habits and customs of the wandering people: but there are few, I take it, who have lived the gypsy-life, who have undergone, or even heard of, the ordeal of the Blue Smoke, the Two Fires, and the Running Water.

Thereafter we met on several occasions: frequently in Italy, or the Tyrol, or southern Germany: generally by pre-arrangement. The last time I saw Fanshawe, until I met him in Glory Woods, near Dorking, was in the Hohenheim country, on the high plateau to the southwest of Stuttgart. It was then he told me he had been to England, and had

travelled afoot from Southampton to Hull: and that he had at last decided to settle in that country, probably in the New Forest region. I promised to visit him in England when next there. I wanted to fare a while with him there and then; but as it was clear he did not at that juncture wish my company, I forbore.

James Fanshawe was a noticeable man. Tall, sinewy, ruddy, though with dark, luminous eyes and long, trailing, coal-black moustache, he would not have seemed more than thirty years old but for his iron-grey hair, and the deep crow's-feet about his mouth, eyes, and temples. As a matter of fact, he was, at the time I first met him, at the Midsummer's-day of human life; for he had just entered his fortieth year.

One early spring day, when, by the merest hazard, we came across each other in Glory Woods, he reminded me that nearly two years had passed since my promise to visit him. He had not, after all, settled in the south country, but, he told me, in a strange old house, in a remote and wild moorland tract of Derbyshire. While he spoke, I was observant of the great change in him. He had grown ten, fifteen years older in appearance. The iron-grey hair had become white; the

strong face rigid; the swift, alert look now that of a visionary, or of one who brooded much. Perhaps the most marked change was in the eyes. What had always struck me as their dusky, velvety Czech beauty was no longer noticeable. They were much lighter, and had a strange, staring intensity.

But I was glad to see him again: glad to pick up lost clues, and glad to be able to promise to be with him at Eastrigg Manor by the end of the sixth week from that date.

That is how I came to know the " House o' Fanshawe."

CHAPTER II

Eastrigg itself is more than twenty miles from the nearest station. The drive thence seemed the longer and drearier because of the wet mist which hung over the country. Even sounds were soaked up by it. I never passed through a drearier land. Mid-April, and not a green thing visible, not a bird's note audible!

The driver of the gig was taciturn, yet could not quite restrain his curiosity. He was not an Eastrigg man, but knew the place, and all connected with it. He would fain have ascertained somewhat about its owner; perhaps,

too, about myself, or at any rate about my object in coming to the reputed haunted, if not accursed, House o' Fanshawe, where my host-to-be lived alone, attended only by an old man named Hoare, a " foreigner " too, because come from the remote south country. When, however, he found me more reserved than himself, he desisted from further inquiry, or indeed remarks of any kind.

It was in silence that we drove the last ten miles; in silence that we jolted along a rude, grassy highway of olden days, heavily rutted; in silence that we passed, first one, then another gaunt ruin, — two of the many long-deserted lead-mine chimneys which stand here and there throughout that country, and add unspeakably to its desolation. Finally, in silence we reached the House o' Fanshawe.

A small side-door, under heavy beams, opened. An elderly man stood, his right hand over his eyes, and his left holding a lantern which emitted a pale yellow glow, beneath which his face was almost as wan and white as his bleached hair.

He looked at me anxiously, questioningly, I thought. Instinctively, I inquired if Mr. Fanshawe were unwell.

" Are you a doctor? " he asked, almost in a whisper; adding, on my reply in the negative,

"I hoped you might be. I fear the master is dying."

Startled, I unburdened myself of my wet overcoat, and then followed the man along a rambling passage. On the way, he confided to me that though Mr. Fanshawe was up and about, he had been very strange of late, and that he ate little, slept little, and was sometimes away on the Moss or the higher moors for ten or twelve hours at a time; further, that within the last few days he had become steadily worse.

Even this forewarning did not adequately prepare me for the change in my friend. When I saw him, he was sitting in the twilight before a peat fire on which a log, aflame at one end though all charred at the other, burned brightly. His hair was quite white: so white that that of his man, Robert Hoare, was of a yellow hue by comparison. It hung long and lank about his cadaverous face, which, in its wanness and rigid lines, was that of a corpse, except for the dark luminous eyes I remembered so well, once more like what they were in the days I first knew him, but now so intensely, passionately alive, that it was as though the flame of his life were concentrated there. He rose, stiffly and as though with difficulty, and I saw how wo-

fully thin he had become. It was with a shock of surprise I realised what vitality the man still had, when he took my hand in his, gripped it almost as powerfully as of yore, and half led, half pushed me into an arm-chair opposite his own.

Yes, he admitted, he had been ill, but was now better. Soon, he hoped, he would be quite well again. The eyes contradicted the lie of the lips.

After a time our constraint wore off; but though I avoided the subject of his health and recent way of life, he interrupted me again and again to assure me that he would not have let me come so far, to visit so dreary a house and see so unentertaining an invalid, had he known how to intercept me.

Suddenly he rose, and insisted on showing me over the house. Room by room fascinated me; but that small chamber of which I have already spoken, that with the crucifix, gave me nothing short of an uncontrollable repugnance, something akin to horror. He noticed this, though neither the lips offered nor the eyes invited any remark.

No wonder that from the several ominous circumstances of this meeting I was half prepared for some unpleasant or even tragic *dénouement*. But, as a matter of fact, noth-

ing happened to alarm or further perturb me; and long before I went to my room I had noticed a marked improvement in Fanshawe, that is, in his mental condition; physically, he was still very distraught as well as frail, and appeared to suffer extremely from what I took to be nervous cold, though he said it was the swamp-ague. "The Moss Fiend had got him," he declared. He wore a long frieze overcoat, even as he sat by the fire; and all the time, even at our frugal supper, kept his hands half-covered in thick mittens.

Naturally enough, I did not sleep for long. In the first place, sleep is always tardy with me in absolutely windless or close, rainy weather; then the absolute silence, the sense of isolation, affected me; and, more effectually still, I could hear Fanshawe monotonously walking to and fro in the room to my right. This room, moreover, was no other than the fantastically decorated ante-chamber. I could scarce bear to think of my distraught friend, sleepless, and wearily active, in the company of that terrifying crucifix, that chamber of the myriad reduplications of the Passion. But at last I slept, and slept well; nor did I wake till the late sunlight streamed in upon me through the unshuttered and blindless window.

We spent most of that day in the open air. The morning was so blithe and sweet, Fanshawe lost something of his air of tragic ill; and I began to entertain hopes of his ultimate recovery. But in the early afternoon, when we had returned for the meal which had been prepared for us an hour before, the weather changed. It grew sultry and overclouded. The glass, too, had fallen abruptly. The change affected my friend in a marked degree. He became less and less communicative, and at last morose and almost sullen.

I proposed another walk. He agreed, with an eagerness that surprised me. "I will show you one or two places where I often go," he added: "places that the country people about here avoid; for the moor-folk are superstitious, as all who live in remote places are."

The day, as I have said, had become dull and heavy; and what with the atmospheric change, and the saturnine mood of my companion, I felt depressed. The two gaunt chimneys which rose above their respective mines were my skeletons at the feast. Otherwise I could have enjoyed many things in, and aspects of, that unfamiliar country; but these tall, sombre, bat-haunted, wind-gnawed "stacks," rising from dishevelled ruins, which,

again, overlay the deserted lead-mines, oppressed me beyond all reason.

At one of these we stopped. Fanshawe asked me to throw something into a hollow place beyond one of the walls of a building. I lifted a large stone, and threw it as directed. I thought, at first, it had fallen on soft grass, or among weeds and nettles, for no sound was audible. Then, as it were under foot, I heard a confused clamour, followed by the faint echo of a splash.

"That will give you some idea of the depth of the mine," my companion remarked quietly. "But it is deeper than you imagine, even now. There are sloping ledges *under* that water in which the stone fell at last; and beneath these ledges are corridors leading far into the caverns whence nothing ever comes again."

"It is not a place for a nervous person to come to," I answered, with as much indifference as I could assume; "nor for any one after sundown, and alone."

Fanshawe looked at me passively, then said quietly that he often came there.

"I wonder," he added, "how many dead will arise from a place like this when the trump of the Resurrection stirs the land?"

"Has any one ever fallen into this mine, or been murdered in it?"

"They say so. It is very likely. But come: I will show you a stranger thing."

So on we trudged again, for, I should think, nearly a mile, and mostly through a thin wood. I wondered what new unpleasant feature of this unattractive country I was to see. It was with half-angry surprise I was confronted at last by a thick scrub of gorse, overhung by three large birches, and told that there was what we had come to see. Naturally, there was nothing to arrest my attention. When I said so, however, Fanshawe made no reply. I saw, that he was powerfully affected, though whether grief or some other emotion wrought him, I could not determine.

Suddenly he turned, said harshly that he was dead tired, and wished to go home straightway. Beyond a statement about a short cut by Dallaway Moor, he did not vouchsafe another remark until we reached the Manor.

At the entrance Hoare met us, and was about to speak, when he saw that his master was not listening, but, rigid, with moving jaw and wild eyes, was staring at the panels of the door.

"Who . . . who has been here?" he cried hoarsely; but for answer the man merely

shook his head stupidly, muttering at last that not a soul had been near the place.

"Who has been here? Who has been here? Who did this?" my friend gaspingly reiterated, as he pointed to a small green cross, the paint still wet, impressed a foot or more above the latch.

CHAPTER III

Fanshawe was taciturn throughout the first part of the evening. We ate our meal in silence. Afterwards, in his study, he maintained the same self-absorption, and for a long time seemed unaware that he was not alone. The atmospherical oppression made this silence still more obvious. Even the fire burned dully, and the smoke that went up from the mist-wet logs was thick and heavy.

It was with a sense of relief I heard an abrupt, hollow, booming sound, as of distant guns at sea. The long-expected thunder was drawing near. For many minutes after this the silence could be heard. Then there came a blast of wind that struck the house heavily, for all the world like an enormous billow flooding down upon and all but engulfing a dismasted ship.

Fanshawe raised his head, and listened in-

tently. A distant, remotely thin wail was audible for a few seconds: the voice of the wind-eddy far away upon the moors. Then, once more, the same ominous silence.

"I hope the storm will break soon," I said at last.

"Yes. We'll have one or two more blasts like that, then a swift rain; then the night will become black as ink, and the thunderstorm will rage for an hour or so, and suddenly come back upon us again worse than before."

I looked at my friend surprisedly.

"How can you tell?"

"I have seen many thunderstorms and gales on these moorlands."

I was about to say something further, when I saw a look upon my companion's face which I took to be that of arrested thought or arrested speech.

I was right in my surmise, for, in a low voice, he resumed:

"You will doubtless hear many another storm such as this. As for me, it is the last to which I shall ever listen: unless, as may well be, the dead hear. After all, what grander death-hymn could one have?"

"You are ill, Fanshawe, but not so ill as you believe. In any case, you do not fear you are going to die to-night?"

He looked at me long and earnestly before he answered.

"I — suppose — not," he said slowly, at last, but in the meditative way of one revolving a dubious matter in his mind: "no, I suppose not necessarily *to-night.*"

A long, discordant cry of the wind came wailing across the Reach o' Dallaway. It was scarce gone, when a ponderous distant crashing betokened the onset of the elemental strife to be fought out overhead.

The effect upon Fanshawe was electric. He rose, moved to and fro, twice went to the window, and drew up the blind. The second time, he opened the latch. The window was of the kind called half-French; that is, it was of a single sheet of glass, but came no further than two-thirds of the way down, the lower third being of solid wood, and could be opened (drawn inward) only in its glazed section.

He withdrew the fastening, stooped, and peered into the yard. A stealthy, shuffling sound was audible, followed by a low whine.

Fanshawe seemed satisfied, and, having closed the latch, drew together the thick, heavy curtains.

"That was my bloodhound, Grailph," he explained. "I always let him out at night

He keeps watch here. He is a huge beast, cream-white in colour, and so is as rare and remarkable as he is trustworthy. I brought him, as a puppy, from Transylvania. The people hereabouts hate and fear him: the more so, because of his name. I have told you about the legend of Grailph Moss? Yes? Well, the rumour has filtered from mind to mind that my Grailph is no other than the original Grailph, or Grey Wolf; and that in some way he, I, and the 'House o' Fanshawe' are connected in an uncanny destiny."

"Are you quite sure you're not?" I interrupted, half in badinage, half in earnest.

He took my remark seriously, however.

"No; I am *not* sure. But who can tell what is the secret thing that lies hidden in the shadow, in the wave, and in the brain?"

"Ah, you remember what old Mark Zengro said that day by the cavern of the Jällusietch, in Bohemia! How well I remember that afternoon: how he called you brother and ——"

"Well?"

"Oh, and what a strange talk we had afterwards by the fire, when ——"

"No; that was not what you were going to say. You were about to add: *'How angry you were when Zengro made with his fore-*

finger the sign of a circle about him; and how you nearly left the camp then and there.' Is not that true?"

"Yes, it is true."

"I thought so. Well, I had good reason to be angry."

"Oh, his action meant only that he took you to be fëy, as we say in the north."

"No, it meant more than that. But this brings me to what I have wanted to say to you: what must be told to-night."

He stopped, for the roar about the house shook it to its foundations: one of those swift, howling whirlwinds which sometimes precede the steady march of the mighty host of the thunder.

When it was over, he pulled away the smoking logs from the fire and substituted three or four of dry pine and larch, already dusted with salt. The flame was so vivid and cheerful that, when my host eclipsed the lamplight, and left us in the pleasant firelit gloom, the change was welcome, though the wildness of the night without seemed to be enhanced.

For at least five minutes Fanshawe sat silent, staring into the red glow over which the blue and yellow tongues of flame wove an endless weft. Then, abruptly, he began:[1]

[1] His narrative, in its earlier stages, was much

"You know that I have Gypsy blood in me. It is true. But I do not think you know how strong in the present, how remote in the past, the strain is. In the twelfth century my parental ancestors were of what might be called the blood-royal among the Children of the Wind. One of them, head of a great clan at that time dispersed, during the summer months, through the region of the New Forest, was named John the Heron. Hunting one day in these woodlands, the king's brother was set upon by outlaws. They would have killed him, or at least withheld him against a ransom, but for the bravery of his unknown Gypsy ally. The royal duke was grateful, and so in turn was the king. Wild John the Heron became John Heron of Roehurst and the lands round Elvwick. He had seven sons, five of whom died tragic deaths or mysteriously disappeared. The eldest in due time succeeded his father; the youngest travelled into Derbyshire in the train of a great lord. In those days the most ancient,

longer than my partial reproduction of it; for some of it dealt with irrelative matters, some of it was merely reminiscent of our own meetings and experiences in common, and some of it was abruptly discursive. Interwrought with it were the sudden tumults, the tempestuous violence of that night of storm: when, through it all, the thunder was to me as the flying shuttle in the loom of Destiny.

the proudest, but even then the most impoverished of the old families of that region, was the house of Ravenshawe. Its head was Sir Alurëd Ravenshawe, a man so haughty that it was said he thought the king his inferior. Gilbert Heron was able to do him a great service; and ultimately, through his influence, the young man succeeded to the name and titles of a beggared and outlawed knight, Sir Vane Fanshawe. Nevertheless, there could have been no question of the marriage of the young Sir Gilbert Fanshawe (for the name of Heron was to be relinquished) with the lady Frida, though the young people had fallen in love with each other at their first meeting; and, ultimately, it was permitted at all, and then reluctantly, only because of two further happenings. The first of these was the undertaking of the great lord with whom the young man was (a near kinsman and friend of Sir Alurëd Ravenshawe), that the king would speedily make Sir Gilbert Fanshawe of Roehurst in Hants and Eastrigg in the shire of Derby a baron. At that time there was no actual village of Eastrigg, but only a small hamlet called Fanshawe, or, as it was then given, The Fan Shawe. These lands belonged to Ravenshawe, and he gave them to his daughter as a wedding gift, on

the condition that the king made her betrothed to a noble, and that he became known as Baron Fanshawe of Fanshawe.

"All this was duly done, and yet there seems to have been deception in the matter of the Gypsy origin; for about the time of the birth of an heir to my lord of Fanshawe, Sir Alurëd refused to hold any communication with his son-in-law, or even to see his daughter. A Ravenshawe, he declared, could have nothing in common with a base-born alien.

"It was some years after this that strange rumours got about concerning not only Lord Fanshawe but also The Chase, as his castellated manor was called. A wild and barbaric folk sojourned in its neighbourhood, or in the adjacent forests. A contagion of suspicion, of a vague dread, of a genuine animosity, spread abroad. Then it was commonly averred that my lord was mad, for had he not been heard to proclaim himself the Christ, or at any rate to speak and act as though he were no other than at least the second Christ, of whose coming men dreamed?

"One day Sir Alurëd Ravenshawe appeared in the camp of the Egyptians, as the alien wandering folk were wont to be called. What he learned from the patriarch infuriated

him to frenzy. 'Let the dog of the race of Kundry die the death he mocks,' he cried; 'and lo, herewith I give you my bond that no harm shall come to you or your people's goods, though you must sojourn here no more.'

"Then it was that the Egyptians waylaid their kinsman, the Lord Fanshawe of Fanshawe, and crowned and mocked him as the Gypsy Christ, and crucified him upon a great leafless tree in the forest now known as the Wood o' Wendray. Thereafter, for a long period, the place knew them no more. But in going they took secretly with them the infant Gabriel, only child of the House o' Fanshawe."

For a time after this Fanshawe ceased speaking. We both sat, our gaze intent upon the fire, listening to the growing savagery of the storm without. Then, without preamble, he resumed. He had a habit, when in the least degree wrought by impatience or excitement, of clasping and unclasping his hands; and his doing so now was the more noticeable because of the strange tapery look of the fingers coming from the rough, close mittens he wore.

"That Gabriel Fanshawe never saw England again, nor yet did his son Gabriel. The

name was retained privily, though among his blood-kin in Austria or Hungary he was known simply as Gabriel Zengro, the kin-name of the patriarch who had adopted him after the crucifixion of his father.

"Long before his grandson was a man well over forty years,— and it was not till then that the third Gabriel visited England to see if he could claim his heritage,— the lands of Eastrigg, the house and hamlet of Fanshawe, and Wester Dallaway, not only were exempted from all claim upon them by any one of the blood of Gilbert Fanshawe, the barony in whose name was cancelled, but had, in turn, passed from the hands of the old knight of Ravenshawe into those of the family of Francis, with whom they remained until the fall of the Jacobite dynasty, after which they were held by the Hewsons, until (sadly diminished) they came again into the ownership of a Fanshawe with my purchase of them.

"But though Gabriel Zengro the third found that he had lost his title and northern inheritance, he was able to recover possession of Roehurst. There he settled, married, and had two children — known only, of course, by his English surname. In the fiftieth year of his age he became markedly unpopular with his fellows. He was seen at times to frequent

a rude and barbaric sect of vagrants, even to live with them; and the rumour spread that his foreign wife was really one of these very aliens. Then he was heard to say wild and outrageous things, such as might well hang a man in those times. The upshot was that one day he returned to his home no more. His body was found transfixed to a leafless tree in the forest beyond Grailph Moss."

"Beyond Roehurst, you mean?" I interrupted.

"No, I mean what I say. His crucified body was found in the forest beyond Grailph Moss, in that part of it called the Wood o' Wendray."

"That is," I interrupted again, "where the same frightful tragedy had been enacted in the instance of the victim's grandfather?"

"Even so. But though Gabriel Fanshawe had been lured or persuaded or kidnapped out of Hants, he was certainly alive after he crossed the Derwent, for a huntsman recognised him among his people one day, and spat on the ground to the north, south, east, and west. The lord of Roehurst disappeared in this mysterious fashion; and none of his neighbours of the south learned aught of his doom, but only his wife knew, the tidings having been conveyed to her I know not how.

But from the record she put in writing, it is clear that with the message had come a summons, perhaps a menace; for, together with her two children, she betook herself to the greater safety of London. There the girl died, calling vainly, and uttering strange words in a tongue no one spake or understood. But the boy lived, and in course of years grew to manhood, and on the death of his mother went to reside upon his own lands. Nor was it till after his marriage, and the birth of a son, that he read the record his mother had caused to be writ, and so came into the knowledge that has been the awe and terror of those lineally descended from him.

"But neither he nor his son came to any harm, save the common doom of all. Of his grandson wild things were said, but all that is known certainly is that he hanged himself upon the great oak in front of Roehurst. He, too, however, had left a Gabriel behind him as his successor, in due time a good knight and learned man, who brought up his only child worthily and steadfastly. Strange that the heir of two such loyal and excellent men should prove so feather-brained as to love the woods better than the streets, and the wild people of the woods better than courtiers and scholars! Stranger still that

the old omens should recur, till, at last, Gervase Fanshawe, after an awful curse upon all of his blood, and terrifying blasphemies, openly set fire to his manor, and himself, with his little daughter (though the young Gabriel escaped), was consumed in the flames.

"Thus, with tragic alternations, went the lives of my forbears, till, after many generations of English Fanshawes, the house of Roehurst came to an end with Jasper Fanshawe."

At that moment so savage an onslaught of wind and rain was made upon the house, so violent a quake of thunder shook the walls, that further speech was impossible for the time. But, save by his silence, my companion took no notice of the tumult. His eyes were very large and wild, and stared spell-bound upon the fire, as though they beheld there the tragic issues to the many memories or thoughts which tyrannised his brain.

"I said that the family of Roehurst," he resumed, as soon as comparative quietude had followed that wild outburst, though the wind moaned and screamed round the gables and among the old chimneys, and the rain slashed against the window-pane in continuous assault, "I said that the family of Roehurst came to an end with Jasper Fanshawe.

This was at the close of the eighteenth century. Jasper was the last of his race, and, the rumour ran, one of the wildest. Almost on the eve of his wedding it transpired that when, in his youth, he had gone away with and lived among the Gypsy-people, he had, as most, if not all, of his progenitors, married a Romany girl. The union was not one that would be recognised by the English law; but the authentic news of it, and the confirmed rumour that Squire Fanshawe had a son and daughter living, brought about a duel between him and the brother of his betrothed. With rash folly this duel was fought in the woods, and witnessed by no one save the Gypsy 'messenger,' who kept the squire always in view."

"The Gypsy-messenger, Fanshawe?"

"Yes. That is the name sometimes used. The old word means the doom-watcher. The latter is the better designation, but I did not care to use it.

"Well, my ancestor killed the man Charles Norton. The deed was the worse for the survivor, in that Norton was the favourite son of the most influential man in the countryside. In a word, the slaying was called murder, and Jasper Fanshawe was proclaimed. His sole chance lay with his blood-folk. The

doom-watcher came into Winchester, and testified to what he had seen while hiding among the bracken in the forest; but his evidence was overborne, and, rightly or wrongly, he was himself clapped into prison on a charge of rick-burning.

"No trace could be found of the fugitive, nor of the 'Egyptians' with whom he made good his escape. The large encampment in Elvwick Wood had broken into sections, which had severally dispersed, and all had vanished almost as swiftly and effectually as the smoke of the camp-fires.

"Whatever I may surmise, I do not know for certain the manner of Jasper Fanshawe's death. His son, James, lived for the most part in Hungary; at other times in the remote lands between the Caspian and the Adriatic. He took in preference the old kin-name of Herne, which, indeed, his father had adopted after his flight from England.

"This James Herne lived to an old age, and became one of the 'elder brothers' of his particular tribal branch. His son Gabriel, however, left his kindred, and went to Vienna, where he studied medicine. There, while still relatively a young man, he gained an important post at Prague, and in a year or so became what would here be called a mag-

istrate. He was noted for his severity in dealing with all vagrants, but especially in the instance of any Gypsy delinquent. At this time, as from his early Vienna days, he was known as Vansar, a Romany equivalent for Fanshawe. On three separate occasions his life was attempted, though each time the would-be assassin escaped. Gabriel Vansar was not the man to be intimidated; indeed, he became only the more stringent and tyrannical, so that soon there was not a gypsy encampment within a twenty-mile radius of Prague. In his thirty-sixth year he was offered a medical professorship in Vienna. In that city he met a Miss Winstane, a beautiful English girl, the sole child of Edward Winstane, a justice of the peace for South Hants, and squire of Roehurst Park and the greater part of the parish of Elvwick. Miss Winstane loved her handsome wooer, and the marriage was duly solemnised. Though he spoke with a slight foreign accent, Mr. Vansar knew his paternal language thoroughly; for though 'James Herne' had ceased to be English in all else, he had been careful to teach his son his native tongue, and indeed always to speak it when alone with him.

"Neither Mr. Winstane nor Winifred Winstane ever knew that Gabriel Vansar was

Gabriel Herne the Gypsy, or, in turn, that he was the grandson of that Jasper Fanshawe whose flight from Roehurst had been followed by the confiscation of his property, and its disposal to Edward Winstane the elder.

"As a matter of fact, Mr. Winstane died a few months after the marriage of his daughter. Gabriel Vansar now relinquished his post, and went to England to live the life of a country squire. There he had three children born to him: two sons and a daughter. Naomi was the youngest by several years, and at her coming her mother went. Of the two sons, Jasper was the elder, I the younger."

CHAPTER IV

Although not taken wholly by surprise, I exclaimed, "*You,* Fanshawe?" — adding that indeed the chain of circumstances was remarkable.

"Yes. . . . Well, when my brother was twenty-one, and I nineteen, our father died. He had changed much since our mother's decease, and had become strangely depressed and even morose. There was adequate explanation of this in the sealed papers which he left to Jasper.

"But now I must diverge for a moment. I

have something very strange to confide to you. . . . But first tell me: have you heard of Kundry?"

"Of Kundry!" I repeated, bewildered.

"You love music, I know; and I thought you might have heard of Kundry."

"Ah, yes, I know now. You mean the woman in *Parsifal?*"

"Yes. At the same time, Wagner does not give the true legend. He did not even know that the name is a Gypsy one, and very ancient. I have heard that some people think it imaginary; others, that it is old-time Scandinavian. But our people, the Children of the Wind, are far more ancient than any one knows. We had earned that very name long before the coming of the Christ. We had, however, another name, which, were I to translate literally, would be something like 'the Spawn of Sheitan': given us because we were godless, and without belief in any after-life, and were kingless and homeless, and, compared with other peoples, lawless. As we were then, so in a sense we are now: for though we do not deny God, we neither worship Him nor propitiate Him nor fear Him; nor have we any faith in a future, believing that with the death of the body that which is the man is dead also; and kingless

we are, save for the common overlords, Time and Death; and homeless, except for the curtains of the forest and the dome of the sky, and the lamps of sun and moon; and, even as the wind is lawless and the sea, so also are we, who are more unstable than the one and more vagrant than the other.

"Nearly nineteen hundred years ago a tribe of our race — 'the first tribe,' it was called, because it claimed to be the original stock — was in the hill-country beyond Jerusalem.

"It was in the year of the greatest moment to the modern world: the year of the death of Jesus of Nazareth.

"I need not repeat even in the briefest way details which are universally familiar. It is enough to say that some of our people were on the Hill of Calvary on the Day of Anguish; that among them was a beautiful wanton called Kundry; and that as the Sufferer passed to His martyrdom, she laughed in bitter mockery. Turning upon her, and knowing the darkness of her unbelief and the evil of which she was the embodiment, the Christ stopped and looked at her.

"'Hail, O King!' she laughed mockingly. 'Vouchsafe to me, Thy Sister, a sign that Thou art indeed Lord over Fate; but Thou

knowest Thou canst not do this thing, and goest to Thy death!'

"Then the Christ spake. 'Verily, thou shalt have a sign. To thee and thine I bequeath the signs of my Passion, to be a shame and horror among thy people, for evermore.'

"Therewith He resumed His weary way. And Kundry laughed, and followed. Again, during the Agony on the Cross, she laughed, and again at the last bitter cry of the Son of God; but in the darkness that suddenly came upon the land she laughed no more.

"From that day the woman Kundry, whom some have held to be the sister of the Christ, was accurst. Even among her own people she went veiled. Two children she bore to the man who had taken her to his tent: children of one birth, a male child and a woman child.

"They were in their seventh year, when, in a wild Asian land, Kundry came out among her people and told them that she, the Sister of Christ, had come to deliver them this message, that out of the offspring of her womb soon or late would arise one who would be their Redeemer, who would be the Gypsy Christ.

"When the young men and maidens of her people mocked, the elders reprimanded them,

and asked Kundry to give some proof that she had not the sun-fever or the moon-madness, or other distemper of the mind. Whereupon the woman appalled them by showing upon her hands and feet the stigmata of the Crucifixion.

"But, after the first wonder, and even awe, a great horror and anger arose among the kindred. Three days they gave her within which to take back that which she had said, and to confess the trickery of which she had been guilty, or at least to reveal the way in which she had mutilated herself and so healed the wounds. At sundown, on the third day, the strange and awful signs were still there; nor would the woman retract that which she had said. So they scourged her with thorny switches, and put a rough crown of them round her head, and led her to a place in the forest where there was a blasted tree. And as she went she stopped once, and looked to see whose mocking laugh made her last hour so bitter; and lo, it was the girl whom she had borne in her womb. Then they crucified her, and she gave up the ghost in the third hour before the dawn. But because that the children were so young, and bore no mark of the Curse, and were of the First Lineage, they were spared."

At this point my companion ceased. Leaning forward, he stared into the fire as one in a vision. A long silence prevailed. Outside, the wind wailed wearily, rising at times into a screaming violence. The heavy belching roar of the thunder crashed upon us ever and again, and even in the firelit room with its closed curtains the lighting glare smote the eyes.

Fanshawe apparently did not hear; perhaps he did not see. I watched him intently, the more curiously because of what he told me and what I inferred. At last a strange, a terrifying cry startled even his abstraction. He sprang to his feet, and looked wildly at the window.

"It was the wind," I said; "I heard it like that a little ago, though not so loudly, or with so weird a scream."

Fanshawe made no reply. After a prolonged stare at the curtained window, and a nervous twisting and untwisting of his fingers, he seated himself again. Then, almost as though he had not broken his narration, he resumed:

"The son and daughter of Kundry were spared by the enemies of the tribe as well as by their kindred, or rather they escaped the cruelty of the one as well as the fanaticism of

the other; for the tribe was almost exterminated by the shores of the Euphrates, and only Michael and Olah, the son and daughter of Kundry, with a few fellow-fugitives, reached a section of their race temporarily settled some fifty miles to the north.

"There 'the laughing girl,' as Olah was called, partly in memory of her mother, partly because of her own laughter at her mother's death-faring, and partly because of the musical mockery wherewith she angered and delighted the tribesmen, brought unhappiness and ruin among 'the rulers.' There were three brothers of the ancient race, and each came to disaster and death through Olah. But through their death Michael came to be what you would call the Prince of the Children of the Wind. There was but one evil deed recorded against him — the murder of his sister. But — so the ancient chronicle goes — this act was not out of cowardice or malice; it was to remove the curse of the mother, not only from those of her blood, but from the race. The deed was done in the year when Michael's wife bore him their second child, a girl. Before Olah's death — and she died in the same way as her mother — she took the little Sampa in her arms, and breathed her life into it. On the day of the crucifixion

the child turned in her sleep in her mother's arms, and laughed as child never laughed before.

"The story thereafter is a long one. It is all in the secret record of our people, though known to a few only. I could tell it all to you, with every name and every happening, but this would serve no purpose to-night. Suffice it, that link by link the chain is unbroken from Michael and Sampa, the children of Michael, brother of Olah, the son and daughter of Kundry who laughed at the Christ on Calvary, even unto the three offspring of Gabriel Fanshawe, who was called Vansar, and was of the tribe of the Heron."

Could it be, I wondered, as I looked intently at the speaker, that this man before me was the lineal descendant of that Kundry who had laughed at Christ; that he was the inheritor of the Curse; and that for him, perhaps, as for so many of his race, the ancestral doom was imminent? With an effort I conquered the superstitious awe which I realised had come upon me.

"Do you mean this thing," I said slowly — "do you mean that you, James Fanshawe, are the direct descendant of Kundry, and that the Curse lives, and that you or some one of your blood, whether of this or a later genera-

tion, must 'dree the weird' even as your forbears have done?"

"Even so: I am as I say; and the Curse lives; and no man can evade the doom that is nigh two thousand years old."

I waited a few minutes, pondering what best to say. Then I spoke:

"The story is a strange and terrible one, Fanshawe. But even if exactly as you have told it, surely there is no logical necessity why you or your brother or sister should inherit the Curse. There has, by your own admission, been frequent admixture of a foreign and Christian strain in your lineage. Your father was, to all practical intents, no more a Gypsy than I am. He married an English girl, and lived the life of a country squire, and was nowise different from his kind except in his perhaps exaggerated bitterness against Gypsies, though, by the way, not so different in this respect either, for the country gentleman loveth not the vagrant. In a word, he himself, with all his knowledge of the past, would have laughed at your superstitious application of the legend."

Fanshawe turned upon me, his great luminous eyes aflame with the fire of despair. I could see that he was in passionate earnest.

"*My sister* might have laughed," he said in

a voice so low as almost to be a whisper, but with significant emphasis: "*my sister* might have laughed, not my father."

"Why, Fanshawe," I exclaimed, startled, "you do not mean to say that your sister is — is —"

"A daughter of Kundry."

I received the remark in silence. I did not know what to think, much less what to say. My nerves, too, were affected by the electric air, the ever-recurrent surge and tumult of the thunderstorm; and I felt bewildered by what I heard, by what, despite its improbability, I knew that I believed. At last I asked him to resume, saying I knew he had not ended what he had set himself to tell me.

"No, I have not ended.

"From what I have told you, will have gathered that the Curse does not show itself in every generation, but in the third. I cannot say that the death record is unvarying, for I do not know; nor has it been possible to trace every particular of a remote ancestry. But here is a strange thing: that in all but three instances, so far as known, no son nor daughter of Kundry has ever had more than two children. From generation to generation that bitter laugh has never lapsed. From generation to generation it has brought about dis-

aster and shame. Many, even as I have done, have dreamed that the Curse might be expiated or outlived; but it may well be that even as in every generation 'the laughing girl' who is of the race of Kundry mocks God, so in every third generation, till the Christ come again or the world be no more, there may be the tragedy of my ancestral woe.

"All this my father knew ere he died. He had meant to carry the secret to the grave, and by many precautions believed he had safeguarded his children from contact with the people he hated and dreaded, though he was of them himself.

"About the time when my father's morose and brooding manner was first noted, my brother Jasper had fallen ill. It was a mysterious trouble, and no doctor could name the malady. Once, only, I saw my father furious, — on the day when he learned that there was an encampment of Gypsies in Elvwick Woods, and that Jasper who was as impassioned in religion as Saint Francis himself, had been among the wandering people, striving to win them to the brotherhood of Christ. Our father did not know that I and my sister Naomi had already discovered the camp, and had been fascinated by the dark people and

their way of life and the forest freedom,—so that we could think of little else, and yearned to be in the greenwood, even as a bird to spread its wings beyond the bars of its cage.

"It must have been immediately after this that my father made the discovery which changed him from one man to another. Neither Naomi nor I knew aught of it at the time, though we were aware that something dire had happened, something of awe, of dread.

"For when Jasper rose from his bed of sickness there were upon his feet and upon his hands the purple bruise and ruddy cicatrix of the great nails of the Crucifixion."

For a few moments Fanshawe paused, and drew a painful, laboured breath, as of a man in pain or a great weakness.

"After our father's death, Jasper shut himself up in his room, and would see no one. I used to creep along the passage at dusk, and listen to the wild incoherences of his prayers. We, Naomi and I, were very dismal, and it was with relief that, one evening, we fled into the forest and joined our friends, more mysterious and alluring than ever because of the terrifying things which had been said of them by him who was now dead.

"Our shortest way was by Elvwick churchyard. Perhaps but for this we would not have thought of looking at our father's grave again: for we did not mean to return to Roehurst. Hand in hand, however, we stole to the spot we had already ceased to regard with the first overwhelming awe.

"The shock was greater than even that of his death had been, for we saw that the grave had been rifled. The coffin was visible, but the lid had been forced open. There was no corpse within. Almost too dazed to be frightened, it was some time before I realised that the outrage must have been committed that very night; for the upturned earth had retained its fresh smell, an axe was lying near the grave, and there were imprints of feet in the damp soil.

"The idea flashed across my mind that our father had somehow come to life again,—perhaps, I thought, he knew of our intended flight and had gone back to Roehurst to frustrate it,—and I could scarce move with terror. Naomi laughed, a strange mirthless laugh that made me turn as though to strike her. Then, shivering and sobbing, we crawled away. I think we were about to return home, when a tall figure arose, called us by our names, and invited us to come and see the merry 'Dance

of the Wolves' around the camp-fire. I told the man — Mat Lee, I remember his name was — what had happened. To my surprise he did not appear shocked or frightened. He was silent for a little; then in a whisper he urged us to run with him at once, lest we should meet the dead man on his way back from the house to the grave.

"That is how my sister and I went to live among our unknown kindred. The very next day, at dawn, the camp was lifted; a week thence we were in Brittany. It was not till long afterwards I learned that it was the tribesmen who had desecrated my father's grave. 'He had been a renegade, and the enemy of his race,' they said, 'and it was only right that though he had lived in honour he should afterwards be flung back to earth as a dead dog is hurled among the bramble or gorse.'

"Once, only, I saw my brother again. I know that he did his best for us. He traced our flight, and kept in touch with us. A 'commando' was sent to him, forbidding him to come near us, or even to go among his kindred anywhere. I was told I was free to go and come as I liked, and that I had money always at my command. Naomi, however, had to abide with the tribe. For three years

I roamed throughout the lands east of Saxony and Bavaria, and as far south as Dalmatia and Roumania. I had been well educated, and was a student; and I learned much, though in my own desultory fashion.

"Then tidings reached me that Jasper had disappeared. It was said that he had been seen in the shore-woods of Lymington, on the Solent; and that he had been drowned, while bathing or boating. An upturned boat had been discovered, in which he had certainly been that forenoon, for he had come in it from Yarmouth in the Isle of Wight.

"I went to England, and in due time entered into possession of the family property. At first (and this was when we met in Surrey) I thought of settling there, for a time. At last, however, I decided to dispose of Roehurst, and realise everything that had come to me; and I had done this, and was about to leave for eastern Europe, when a letter reached me from Derbyshire. *It was in my brother's handwriting.*

"Bewildered, distraught, and angry, I read this strange and unlooked-for communication. The writer was alive, and begged me to come and save him from the enmity of the kindred with whom he had at the end cast in his lot.

new Tauchnitz vol. (*The Sunset of Old Tales*) and expect to complete it (for May) to-night.

"*24th April.* . . . Yes, I was sorry to leave Lismore. It may be my last time in the Gaelic West. (I don't say this 'down-ly'—but because I think it likely. There is much I want to do, and now as much by W. S. as by F. M. and that I realise must be done abroad where alone can I keep well and mentally even more than physically (*How* I hope Fontainebleau may some day suit us.) Dear MacC. was sorry to part to. He shook hands (with both his) and when I said in Gaelic 'Good-bye, and Fare-well upon that, my friend,' he said, 'No—no'—and then suddenly said, 'My blessing on you—and good-bye now!' and turned away and went down the pier-side and hoisted the brown sail and went away across the water, waving a last farewell."

The cold proved so disastrous that my husband was ordered to Neuenahr for special treatment. Thence he wrote to the Hon. A. Nelson Hood:

June, 1905.

MY DEAR JULIAN,

Just a brief line, for I am still very re-

"An hour before dawn, three of the kindred entered the tent. They put a bandage about my eyes, and secured my arms. I heard them lift Jasper and put him upon a hurdle of larch-boughs. In the chill air we went silently forth. In about a quarter of an hour we came to a standstill upon a rising ground. I heard Jasper repeat in a husky voice that he was not worthy to be the Christ; that he was not the Christ; and that he prayed that with him might pass away forever the curse of Kundry.

"There was a brief silence after that; then a rustling sound in the air; then, after an interval, a thud, thud, thudding, followed by a splash.

"'No man ever comes back from the bowels of the lead-mine, O James of the tribe of the Heron, of the race of Kundry,' whispered a voice in my ear.

"When, an hour later, the bandage was taken from my eyes, I was on the moor just above the House o' Fanshawe. A boy was beside me, his face covered with a slouch hat. In a few words, in our ancient language, he told me that I was by the village of Eastrigg, and that twenty miles south of me lay Fothering Dale, whence I could easily go in any direction; anywhere, he added significantly,

where the tongue can be silent and the memory dead.

"I made no inquiries about the matter I have told you. Fortunately I had informed no one of the letter I had received. This letter I burned. But I ran a great risk by returning a few days later to Eastrigg. The reason was this: I had learned, from the papers to which my brother had alluded, the whole story of our doomed race, the race of Kundry; and I decided to try one more desperate hazard against Fate, for I could not be sure that Jasper's death would remove the Curse. In a word, I decided to make my home in this place where my ancestor and brother suffered such cruel deaths, and to die here; for I found in my papers an ancient prophecy, both in English and Romany, to the effect that when a woman of the race of Kundry would voluntarily sacrifice herself at the Hill of Calvary, or when a man of the race of Kundry would live and die at the place where one of his kindred had suffered for the Curse, the doom might be removed.

"Thus it was that I became possessor of this strange 'House o' Fanshawe.' But I had something to do before I settled here.

"When everything that had to be done was done, I went abroad to seek my kindred, and

more particularly my sister Naomi. Perhaps you guess my object. I had more hope of success, from the circumstance that Naomi was of a passionately enthusiastic nature; and that, of late, she had even dreamed of leaving her people (for one strain in her fought against the other) to enter a Sisterhood of Mercy.

"But my people had gone, and the clues were already old and complicated. I went through Hungary, across Transylvania, hither and thither in Roumania, and from end to end in Dalmatia. Everywhere I was on their track, but the trail was confused. It was not till I had gained the Bavarian highlands that the conclusion was forced upon me I was being misled. This became a certainty after I had followed a sure trail through Suabia and so to the Lands of the Moselle. At Trèves I was directed southward, and went blindly on a false track that led through southern France towards the Basque provinces; but at last, at a place in Provence called Aigues-Mortes, I met a life-brother (that is, one whose life had been saved when otherwise it would have been lost, and who has vowed his life-service to his saviour, whenever required), whom I put upon his oath. He told me that the Zengri, the Hernes, and two other tribes were not in

southern Europe at all, but in England. I had hit upon the right trail between Heidelberg and the Mösel, but, when almost upon my people at Trèves, had been skilfully diverted. And the reason for this was the extraordinary ascendency of my sister. My heart sank as I heard this tidings. I feared that the Curse had already shown itself; but my informant assured me I was wrong in this surmise. It was merely that Naomi had fascinated the tribes-folk, and, particularly since the death of the old Peter Zengro, had become practically a queen. Her word was law.

"Of course I could not tell the exact reason why she wished to evade me. Possibly she feared I might resent her ascendency, and try to usurp her; possibly she had some reason to fear that the always latent enmity against any of the race of Kundry would be directed against me. As likely as not, she had several schemes to fulfil, all or even one of which might be frustrated by my appearance on the scene.

"Nevertheless, I decided to travel straight to England, and, as soon as practicable, gain an interview with Naomi.

"For some weeks after I reached this country I was again purposely misled. Yet from one thing and another I became more

and more anxious to meet Naomi soon. Strange rumours were abroad. At Ringwood in the New Forest, I overheard some words by the camp-fire (when I was supposed to be asleep) which made my heart shrink.

"Once again I lost all clue. Then it was that I remembered Nathan Lee,—an intimate friend of yours as well as of mine,—who, because of his great love for his wife, had sworn never to leave the neighbourhood of Glory Woods, where she was buried. I travelled with all speed to Dorking. From Lee I learned what I wanted to know. By a strange fatality, Naomi had made her headquarters in the Wood o' Wendray, beyond Eastrigg. But was it a blind fatality? That was what troubled and perturbed me. Why had she, why had our particular tribe, settled at the accursed spot where Jasper Fanshawe had met his fate?

"It was at this time that I met you in Glory Woods. The next day I was back in the village of Elvwick, and had arranged with Robert Hoare, the late gardener at Roehurst, and his wife, to come and keep house and generally look after me at Eastrigg Manor.

"Almost every day after I was settled I rode over to the Wood o' Wendray; but the ban was upon me, and I was warned not to

approach the camp. Thrice I set the ban at defiance, and strode into the camp, but on no occasion saw any sign of Naomi. This was the more strange, as, on the third time, I arrived at sunset, 'the hour of the smoke,' when the gypsies meet round the fire to talk and smoke and break their long day-fast. It was after this third visit I was formally warned that my next defiance of the ban would be my last. I knew this to be no idle threat. Thereafter I had to be more cautious. I no longer rode across the moor; but, either in the morning twilight or in the late afternoon, wandered here and there across the uplands: sometimes by the deserted lead-mines, sometimes by the Green Pool, sometimes even within the outskirts of the Wood o' Wendray.

"I met you in Glory Woods in the spring, and now it is autumn. It was exactly midway in this time that I learned a dreadful thing.

"One day a message came to me, in Naomi's writing, to be at the Green Pool beyond Dallaway mine at dawn on the morrow.

"I was there, of course. The morning was raw and misty. Even at the margin of the Pool I could not see the further side. Suddenly, however, I heard whispered voices

and the trampling of feet. I called, and was at once answered. I was bidden not to stir from where I was. The voice was that of Naomi, but with a note in it I had never heard before.

"'Is that you, James Fanshawe, of the tribe of the Heron, of the race of Kundry?'

"'It is I, Naomi, daughter of Gabriel. It is I, your blood-brother.'

"'Then know this thing. She whom you wedded secretly, Sanpriella Zengro, is dead.'

"I gave a cry of pain. . . . I have not told you that, during my last year with my people, I loved Sanpriella, the daughter of Alexander Zengro, the brother of Peter Zengro, of the First Tribe. But Alexander Zengro feared and hated any of the race of Kundry; so we loved secretly. This was one reason why I was so eager to find my people again; for Naomi was not, as you may have supposed, my one quest. I knew that Sanpriella was with child, and I longed to make her my wife before all men.

"'Is it so?' I cried in a shaking voice, because of my sore pain; 'is it so, upon the oath of the crossed sticks and the hidden way?'

"'I say it. May tree fall on me, and water gain upon me, and the falling star light

on me, if I speak not truth. Sanpriella is dead. She lies in the wood of Heiligenberg, beyond the Neckar. And now listen to the doom, thou son of Kundry.'

"My heart leapt at these ominous words, doubly ominous and strange coming from one of my own blood.

"'Unto Sanpriella were born twin children, a boy and a girl. The girl lives, though you shall never see her. She is in a far land from here, and the lines of her life are already known. The boy . . . the boy is . . . dead.

"'But know this thing, James, my blood-brother. The doom of Kundry was upon him. His mother hid the thing, but after her death the Curse was visible. Upon his hands were the bruised wounds of the nails of the Crucifixion.'

"With a shuddering cry I sank to my knees. Wildly I prayed, implored Naomi to say it was not true; that it was hearsay; that some natural cause had been mistaken for this horrible mystery.

"'Therefore,' she resumed unmoved, 'the ban is upon you also. Take heed lest a worse thing befall you. It will be well if you leave this place where you live, and for ever. Be a wanderer upon the face of the earth; it will

be for you safer so: but avoid the trail of the Children of the Wind as you would the pestilence. And now — farewell!'

"'My child lives — my daughter lives!' I cried despairingly.

"There was a long silence. I called again and again, but met with no response. Thick as the mist was, I raced round the Pool like a greyhound. There was no one near. I ran out upon the moor, but there I was like a derelict boat in wide ocean in a dense fog. I could see nothing, hear nothing. All that day the mist hung impermeable; all that day I abode where I was."

Once more a long silence fell upon Fanshawe. Outside, the shrieking of the wind was appalling. The rain slashed against the house as though all the sluices of the thunderstorm were concentrated there. The thunder was no longer overhead, but a raucous blast — distinct from the blind, furious gale — moved to and fro like a beast of prey. I was overcome by the strange and terrible tale I had listened to. Then and there, to that wild accompaniment, it all seemed deadly true, and as inevitable as Destiny.

With an abrupt gesture, Fanshawe suddenly resumed:—

"On the eve of that day I walked swiftly across the moor. The sun was almost on the horizon as I reached the eastern edge of Grailph Moss. Suddenly, I stopped as one changed into stone. Black against the sunset-light I saw a tall figure stand; with head thrown back, and arms wide outstretched from the sides. Was it a vision of the Christ? That was the thought which came to me. Then the figure disappeared, absorbed in the mist over Grailph Moss. I turned and went home. It was Naomi I had seen.

"The next evening I was in the same place, at the same hour.

"Again I saw Naomi, in that sunflame Crucifixion. Once more she disappeared, and across the Moss. I knew of no encampment there, but unquestionably she had moved swiftly westward.

"On the third afternoon I was there again, earlier. This time I had with me my white bloodhound. We crouched in good hiding till Naomi passed. I made Grailph sniff her track. When the sun set, she disappeared as before. I held Grailph in leash, and followed swiftly. In less than an hour I came upon her. She was standing in a waste place, near the centre of a broken circle of tall slabs. These were the Druidic Stones, known almost

to none save the most daring explorers of the Moss, for they are in a region beset with quagmires.

"She was speaking, with outstretched arms, as if in prayer. There was no one visible. She was, I saw, in a trance, or ecstacy.

"When, suddenly, she descried me, she leapt like a deer on to a narrow dry path beyond the stones. She would certainly have evaded me but for Grailph. The hound slid beyond like running water in a rapid. In less than a minute he had headed her off.

"When I came up with her, I expected either furious denunciation, or at least a summary command that I should return straightway. She did no more than look at me intently, however. She had already forgotten what had lain between us. She was possessed.

"'*Naomi,*' I said simply.

"'I am Naomi, blessed among women.'

"I stared, perplexed.

"'Why do you follow me here to spy me out? Beware lest God strike thee for thy blasphemy.'

"'My blasphemy, Naomi?'

"'Even so. I come here to meet the spirit of God.'

"'Tell me, my sister, is this true what I have heard: that you are with child?'

"Her eyes flamed upon me. But her voice was cold and quiet as she replied,—

"'It is true. The Lord hath wrought upon me a miracle. I have immaculately conceived, and the child I shall bear will be the Gypsy Christ,— the long dreamed-of, the long waited-for second Christ.'

"'This is madness. Come with me; come home with me, Naomi.'

"'The green earth is my home; and the wind is my brother, and the dust my sister.'

"'Come!'

"Then in a moment her whole look and mien changed. The flame that was in her eyes seemed to come from her very body. Her voice now was loud, raucous, imperious. The hound whined, and sidled to my feet.

"'I am the Sister of Jesus, I am no other than Kundry, deathless in my woe until these last days. I am the Mother of the Christ that is to be. And you, *you* son of my mother's womb, you are ordained to be my prophet! Go forth even now: go unto our people in the woods: declare, declare, declare, to them, to all, that the Gypsy Christ cometh at last!'

"I was shocked, terrified even. But after a throbbing silence I spoke, and firmly:

"'This is madness, Naomi. Already the

Curse is heavy enough upon us. Do you not know that our brother Jasper was done to death yonder because of this doom of ours; that because of this awful malison on the race of Kundry . . . that . . . my little son. . . .'

"'I know all,— what has been, what is, what shall be. Once more I ask you: will you be the prophet of the Gypsy Christ?'

"'No, never, so help me God!'

"'This is the fourth day of this Week of the Miracle. To-morrow thou hast; and the day after; and yet again, another day. Repent while there is yet time. But if thou dost not repent, thine end shall be as that of thy dog. An awful sign shall be with thee this very night; yet another shall be with thee on the morrow; and on the third thou shalt receive the message of the Cross. Then thou shalt waver no more, for whom all wavering is for ever past. And now, begone!'

"Broken in spirit, I turned. When, a hundred yards thence, I looked back, there was no trace of Naomi anywhere.

"That night I had the first sign."

Here Fanshawe ceased for a moment, and wiped the cold sweat from his forehead with a hand tremulous as a reed. His voice had sunk into a dull monotony, to me dreadful.

"On the day following, I had the second sign. Drops of blood oozed from the red figure of the Christ that you have seen in my room. Then you came. To-day I have had the message of the Cross. You saw it yourself: a green cross on the portal of the house.

"Then at last my terror overmastered me. Also, I yet hoped to prevail with Naomi. Thus it was that when I left you abruptly this afternoon I rode across the moor to the Wood o' Wendray. I reached the camp, but only the ashes of dead fires were there. Yet I know my people wait, and Naomi has my life in the hollow of her hand."

But here I broke in eagerly.

"Come, Fanshawe, come with me at once, the first thing to-morrow. You must not be here another day. It is madness for you to remain. Why, in another week you would persuade yourself that you too had inherited this so-called curse!"

"*Look!*" he shouted, springing to his feet, tearing the coverings from his hands, and holding forth the palms to me, rigid, testifying, appalling: "*Look! Look! Look!*"

And, as I live, I saw upon the hands the livid stigmata of the Passion!

With a cry, I repelled him. A great horror seized me. But the next moment a greater

pity vanquished my weakness. He had already fallen. I took him in my arms, and laid him back on his chair.

James Fanshawe was dead.

For some minutes I stared, paralysed, upon the still face that had just been so wrought with a consuming frenzy. A deep awe came upon me. I crossed the room, threw back the window, and looked out. Grailph the hound was not there. Nor could he have been lurking near, for at that moment I saw a man glide swiftly across the yard, and disappear into the gloom.

The rain was over, the thunder rumbled far across the moors; the wind, too, had veered, and I heard it crying like a lost thing in the deep ravine of the Gap.

I stayed quietly beside my friend, keeping vigil till the dawn. While it was still dark, I went again to the window, and looked out. On the moor I could hear two larks singing at a great altitude. Doubtless they had soared to meet the dawnlight.

I thought of Naomi, whose madness would surely bring upon her, and that soon, the awful ancestral doom. Yet of this I knew I should hear nothing. The Children of the Wind have a saying: The dog barks by day, and the fox by night; but the Gypsy never lets

any one know whence he comes, where he is, or whither he goes.

Sometimes the horror of it all makes me long to look upon it as an evil dream. Has the dreadful Curse at last worked itself out? With a sudden terror, I remember at times that James Fanshawe had two children born to him. What of the girl? Did she, too, laugh when her kindred led Naomi to her doom? Even now doth she move swift and sure towards that day when she shall go quick with child; when she or the child or the child's child shall arise and say, "Behold the Gypsy Christ has come at last!"

The Lady in Hosea

THE LADY IN HOSEA

I

"And she shall follow after her lover, but she shall not overtake him; and she shall seek him, but shall not find him; then shall she say, I will go and return to my first husband; for then was it better with me than now!"—HOSEA.

When John Dorian, with the help of the poker and the flaming coals, had demolished Dream No. LIII. and last, he lit a cigar. Then he lay back in a deep, padded arm-chair, in order to enjoy to the full his evening paper.

The effort had been exhausting. He was a sentimentalist, and had been wont to mark his love-letters, after they had reached the tenth, as "Dream I.," "Dream II.," and so on. True, he had not gone through the whole fifty-three that night. The little india-rubber bands which had been round Claire's letters lay beside the ash-tray on the mantel-piece, like an angler's heap of worms, discarded because of their premature death; but the pile could not have consisted of more than about a score and a half. As a matter of fact, Dreams XV. to XXI. had escaped the ruthless

poker. Covered with kisses, warmed with sighs, they had been cremated in the late days of June. They were — I should say had been — animated by aspirations of soul-union, assurances concerning Immortality, and perfectly lucid and frank expositions of a vivid passion. In a word, they were so explicit that John Dorian had found himself forced to submit them to a double committal: first, to his heart (as he designated his memory), and then to the fire. Again, Dreams XLV. to LI. had, though autumnal, endured a like fate. True, they were without any remarks about Immortality; on the other hand, the union of mind, soul, and body, particularly the third partner in the trinity, was emphasised in them with ardour, eloquence, and a pleading yearning.

By an accident, five missives from another lady had been tied up with those from Claire. These had been discovered one Sunday when, unwell with a chill, and brooding upon the immortality of a great passion, Dorian had permitted himself the dangerous luxury of a reperusal of his love-letters. Only skilled *chefs* should attempt pleasant surprises in the way of *réchauffés*.

In the peaceful quiet of that Sabbath afternoon thirteen epistles had been done to death:

seven, too passionate, from Claire; five, too financially exigent, from Mademoiselle Phalène.

Thus it was that on this October night John Dorian, on demolishing the discarded raiment of his Dreams, confided to the appreciative secrecy of his fire no more than four-and-thirty burning missives. The epithet is hyperbolical; but there is no doubt about its actuality in the past participle.

A few weeks ago "Dream LIII." would have meant to him no more than the fifty-third kiss he had received from Claire. It would have been simply a delightful link between Ffty-two and Fifty-four. But when LIII. is indorsed "and last," the number stands forth from its fellow-figures, the elect of Fate.

An effort? Yes; it had been an effort to read through, latterly to glance at, those thirty-four remnants of an undying passion. Dorian had two small ivory figures by the sculptor Dampt. They ornamented his twin bookcases by the fireside; above the shelves to the right, "Aspiration," with upraised arms and trance-wrought face; above the shelves to the left, "Consummation," supine, satisfied, with wearied eyes.

He looked at the little group to the left,

while Dream LIII. emitted the unpleasant odour of waste paper aflame. He smiled unwittingly, then, wittingly, sighed. Then he lit his cigar, seated himself, and leisurely unfolded the news-sheet.

The "leader" interested him. Half-way down the column on the ensuing page, "The Casket of Pandora," he read: "The lover is ever a sophisticator."

"True," he muttered indolently, while he stretched his feet nearer the fire-glow; "how true! one sophisticates oneself with dreams of impossible virtues and charms."

"Sophisticator!" he resumed. "Let me see what the dictionary has to say, if there *is such a word.*"

With a slight effort he obtained the volume he sought from the swing-bookcase near his chair.

"Ah! here we are: *sophistical, sophisticate, sophisticator.* H'm. . . . '*Sophisticator:* one who adulterates, debases, or injures the purity of anything.'"

The dictionary must have become limp from long disuse, for in a few seconds it slipped to the floor, and lay there, unheeded, in a dead faint.

A hunted look had come into John Dorian's eyes, but it passed. For some time he stared

blankly into the fire. Then suddenly he resumed his perusal of the *Quadrant Gazette*.

With a yawn, he skipped the "Casket of Pandora" column. "These paragraphists," he muttered, "either talk rubbish, or bore one with their rehashed hash."

There was wind without. It came down the street, at times, blowing a loud clarion: a minute later it would swirl away again, with a rattling fanfaronade among the chimney-tops. Now and again a flurry of rain slapped the window-panes.

It was certainly comfortable by the fire. Possibly it was sheer tampering with luxury that made Dorian rise and wander restlessly about the room.

The rumble of the Piccadilly omnibuses outside emphasised the cheerful quietude of the room.

Its solitary occupant wavered between a cabinet in one corner filled with blue china, and in another corner, an escritoire. This lured him. He seated himself in front of it, opened a drawer, and, taking out and unfolding a diary, glanced at page after page. An entry in August arrested his attention.

"*August* 21.—Still here at Llandllnys. Did not leave on Monday, as Cecil T. was summoned to Chester on some magisterial matter. He expected

to be back that night, but wired that he would be detained two or three days, and hoped I would prolong my stay. I did. Claire brought me the message. Her eyes were lovely. She knew I would stop. What days these have been! Never, never, shall I forget them! What a deep joy it is that she and I are so absolutely one with the other! To think of it: she, Claire; I, John Dorian, at one for ever and ever! There can be no end to a passion such as ours. It is the nobler, the stronger, because of our great renunciation. Neither she nor I will leave Cecil Trevor a mourner. Indeed, it would be cruel if, having by undreamed-of hazard taken royal possession of his wife's heart, I should also break up his home by removing her to another clime as *my* wife. No, we will be strong. Love has been compassionate, and given each unto each. What need to go to the last extremity?—a bitter one at the best. No; there will be no elopement. But I am hers and she is mine in life and death. Ah, *Death!* No! no! no death for us! For all eternity our love shall endure. She and I, I and she, together for ever and ever."

Dorian closed the diary with a snap. Rising, he replaced the book, and then walked slowly to the window. He drew back the blind. The cloud-rack was broken for an interval; overhead, like dark frozen water between ice-banks, he could see a width of sky. A planet, a score or more of stars, glistered icily.

"For all eternity," he muttered; "I and

she, she and I, for ever and ever." For a few minutes he was silent, motionless, profoundly intent. Then he smiled.

"Ah, I was always a star-gazer!"

With that he went back to his chair in front of the fire, took up a new magazine in lieu of the newspaper, and made ready to enjoy himself.

Doubtless he would have succeeded, but fate willed otherwise. The tap of a postman was the particular disguise taken by Nemesis.

"A letter for you, sir," said his man, holding out a salver on which lay a business-looking envelope.

"H'm. Just wait a moment, George. Ah! — ah! it's from Anderson and Anderson. . . . George, are you there?"

"Yes, sir."

"George, if a lady should call for me to-night or to-morrow, you are to tell her I am not here. Say — oh! let me see — that she is just too late; that I left this morning for Paris, *en route* for the East. Tell her I won't be back again for years."

"If she wants me to take or send you any message?"

"In that case tell her that you will ceretainly do so; only, add that it had better not be urgent, as you don't expect to join me in

the East till after I telegraph to you from — let us say Egypt."

"Very good, sir."

The man hesitated, fidgeted, but thought better of his intent, whatever it was. As soon as he had gone Dorian eagerly scanned the note he had received. It was from a firm of solicitors, and was to the effect that it was true Mrs. Cecil Trevor had left her home; that she had called to ask his, John Dorian's, address; and that to-morrow if not to-day, or the day after if not to-morrow, she would certainly obtain it from some one.

It is a common mistake to say that Nemesis never blunders. That policeman of the gods can, and does, sometimes appear on the scene too soon, or too late, or otherwise inopportunely. He came down Piccadilly a second time this evening, disguised this time as Claire Trevor.

Dorian was half-way through his second cigar when he heard a hansom stop beneath his windows. This was followed by a tap at the front door. To the tap succeeded the opening of the door; then a sustained conversation.

"I am no coward," said John Dorian, "but I will retire — ah! — to the bathroom!"

II

Mrs. Trevor, as she sat before the fire in her room in the Whitehall Hotel, did not know whether to laugh or cry. This was not because she was either amused or chagrined, but because she believed her heart was broken. There are women, as there are men, who, fronting irredeemable disaster, with a heart almost callous on account of its pain, scarce know whether laughter or sobs shall best ease them.

Claire Trevor had taken the step which experience tells should never be taken: that is, she had burned the ship of her married life. All manner of misadventure may be wrought against that vessel, but it should never be burned; at least, not until another has been boarded by invitation, and a licence as first mate duly obtained. In other words, she had not only left her home and husband, but had also been rash enough to leave a letter behind her for Cecil Trevor. It told him that she loved, and was loved by, John Dorian; that she could not live without the said John, and that it would be criminal on her part to remain a day longer with him, Cecil, as his wife. Lest there should be any mistake, she had added a few particulars.

She had no children. She did not love Cecil Trevor: but she had not suspected this until — well! The suspicion developed into a fact when, after a few months' acquaintanceship, John Dorian read her his two-act play. *For Better, for Worse.* At the moving sentimentality which did duty as a dramatic close, he had informed her that she was the heroine, Helen, and he Paris, the hero.

In the process she lost a few ideals. These are seldom missed at first, and it was some time before she realised that they were gone. She sighed, with true feeling, but said to herself that she would be brave.

One idea, however, she did hold, not only dear and intimate, but inviolate. This was the chivalrous love, the unalterable devotion, of John Dorian.

It had not been without difficulty that she obtained his new address. Circumstances had kept them apart for three months, and in that time he had shifted his quarters more than once.

For a woman without much intuition, it is to her credit that she was not only undeceived by the instructed lie of Dorian's valet, but at once guessed that her lover wanted "Finis" to be written to their romance. She had little imagination, and she did not under-

stand how this finality could be; but she felt it in the very core of her heart. The tragi-comedy had fizzled out while, having left without an attempt to expostulate with, or even force an interview upon, her lover, she drove back to her hotel.

For a long time she had stared into the fire, till her eyes ached. At last she rose, and took two photographs from her leather-covered desk. The insolent light of the gas flamed upon her. By a vague instinct she turned it lower, and also avoided a glimpse of herself in the adjacent mirror.

There was ample light to see the photographs by. One was of a man about five-and-thirty, tall, elegant, graceful even, evidently dark, with oval dusky eyes, short hair with a wave in it at the sides, clean contours, a sensitive nose and mouth, a self-conscious smile on the face, the hands artistic, but with the thumbs noticeably lifted backward. A good-looking man of the world, in most judgments, no doubt. To a close and keen observer everything, from the thumbs to the pointed ears, betokened the refined and cultured animal which had the arrogance to believe that it was kin to Apollo, and the blindness not to see that it was of the brotherhood of Pan the Satyr. All the possibilities

of the epileptic slept in that comely exterior. The life in him was phosphorescent fungus in a grave.

Mrs. Trevor took the ordinary view. The photograph pained her by its tantalising truth. Long and earnestly as she looked at it, she stared longer and more intently at the other. It represented a young woman who could not have passed her twenty-seventh year; blonde, with a graceful figure. That, really, was all you or I might discern were we to come upon the likeness in an album. Claire Trevor, however, saw more. She evoked a woman whose tender heart gave a lovely life to the blue eyes, an exquisite, unwhispered whisper to the lips. She saw the rippling fair hair moving in the warm breath of her lover. Within, she beheld a strong and heroic mind fronting the Shadow of Fate — an undaunted, unselfish, greatly daring Soul. As a matter of fact, what she saw were merely some rainbow shimmerings from a land where she had never fared. A great number of other people's thoughts occupied almost every available cell in her brain, and the accommodation for her own mind was almost as limited as that dusty back-parlour wherein her soul (without a capital) lay bedridden and blind.

The past tense should have been more em-

phasised. Probably that evening a few more cells had been opened, and others summarily usurped by tyrannical new-comers. As for the invalid in the back-parlour, it had doubtless risen, and was fumbling about in the dark.

When Mrs. Trevor seated herself again, she took Dorian's photograph and laid it between two coals which glowed vehemently, despite the corroding ash at their base. The card crackled, shrivelled, and became a malodorous nonentity. A minute or two elapsed before Claire's photograph was likewise cremated. It fell sideways, and in the spurt of redeeming flame she read the date of the night when she had given herself to John Dorian — a night which had succeeded an evening of singular beauty, wherein the stars moved with a polar magnificence of light, and yielded in glory only to the promise of eternity which the uncontrolled passion of two hearts discerned in the frosty indifference of those remote luminaries.

Even a cremated passion does not add fuel to a fire. Perhaps the fire resents the intrusion of a quenched flame, particularly if it, too, has been slowly dying. At any rate, the photographs of two aspirants for immortality ended in smoke. To expedite the burial Mrs.

Trevor stooped, to utilise the poker. As she reached forward, a locket swung from her bosom, struck the mantelpiece, and hung open, its two sides outspread, as though it were a metallic butterfly, the emblem of hope.

She relinquished her intention, though as a matter of fact the service of the poker was not now needed.

Instead, she sat back and stared at the miniature in the locket. It was an excellent likeness of Cecil Trevor. Looking at it, she could see every feature of her husband: his rather furrowed brow, fairly well marked; his heavy eyebrows and calm hazel eyes; his heavy, straight nose, with its rigid nostrils; his slightly curly brown beard, unbroken from the ear-level, and in the vogue of Henry VIII, his large, ill-formed, but kindly mouth; his coarse jowl and dogged chin. She knew that he was taller than the broad squire suggested in the miniature, and also that his voice was softer than a stranger would infer. And as she looked she believed she saw something in the eyes she had never seen before.

With a cry she rose, then sank to her knees and hid her face in her hands, while her hair swept the chair like a creeper over a ruin.

The fire had almost subsided into ash when she arose and slowly began to undress. She pondered the advisability of a prayer, but, on

second thoughts, decided not to intrude herself just then on an offended and probably resentful Providence. There would be ample time on the morrow, when she would feel more purged of her sin.

"I will go back," she whispered to herself. She lay down in the vague discomfort of a new loneliness. "I will go back. Perhaps he will forgive; perhaps he will let me atone; perhaps he loves me still."

The invalid inmate of the back-parlour murmured indistinctly, "Oh, what a fool, *what* a fool you have been!"

III

When Claire Trevor reached the station for Llandllnys, it was to learn that she was a widow.

During the long drive she wept sincerely for her resurrected affection, so untimely slain.

Did Cecil know all? Do the dead see, understand? The thought troubled her; but she did not disguise from herself that she was more anxious as to how much he knew when he was alive.

"Death, the result of an accident in the hunting-field." That was what she had been told. The accident had occurred in the afternoon of the morning when she had taken her

fatal step. There was just a chance Mr. Trevor had not seen the insensate letter she had written.

That drive aged Mrs. Trevor. She felt as though she were driving away from her youth.

At the threshold of her home — if it still was her home — she was met by the vicar. His manner was deeply sympathetic and considerate — so considerate that she inferred safety so far. The vicar's profound respect indicated her acceptance in his eyes as the heiress of Llandllnys.

Claire Trevor never quite forgave herself because when she looked upon the corpse of her husband she saw only, thought of only, dreaded only, the letter he held in his folded hands.

"What does it mean?" she whispered hoarsely to Mr. Barnby.

"Your last letter," the vicar replied with tender unction. "It was brought to him before the end by the servant, who had forgotten to deliver it before his master went out riding. He was too weak to open it. He kissed it just before he died. When he pressed it against his heart, the heart had already stopped. Take it, my dear madam, take it; it will be a lovely memento for you for the rest of your life."

PART III

Ecce Puella and Other Prose Imaginings

To The Woman of Thirty

ECCE PUELLA

"A Dream of Fair Women: Every man dreams this dream. With some it happens early in the teens. It fades, with some, during the twenties. With others it endures, vivid and beautiful under grey hairs, till it glorifies the grave."—H. P. SIWÄARMILL.

I

The beauty of women: could there be any theme more inspiring? There is fire in the phrase even. But, as with Love, Life, Death, the subject at once allures and evades one. It would be easier to write concerning it a bulky tome than a small volume, and that again would be less difficult than a sketch of this kind. Who can say much about love, without vain repetitions? Only the poet — whether he use pigments or clay, words or music — can flash upon us some new light, or thrill us with some new note, or delight us with some new vision. There is nothing between this quintessential revelation and that unaccomplished and for ever to be unaccomplished History of Love which Charles Nodier said would be the history of humanity and the most beautiful book to write.

What mortal can say enough about the beauty of woman to satisfy himself? How much less can he say enough to satisfy others?

"For several virtues have I liked several women": and we may adapt Shakespeare's line, and say that for several kinds of beauty have men admired women as different from each other as a contadina of the Campagna and an Eskimo Squaw.

I realise my inadequacy. I would have my readers understand that if I were to write as I feel, I would speak not wisely but too well! Fortunately, I cannot rhapsodise: but for this, I might win honour in the eyes of ladies, and concurrently a very natural outpouring of envy and all uncharitableness on the part of my fellow-men. Personally, I would have no hard-and-fast dogmas. Fair women, be they tall or short, dark or fair, vivacious or languorous, active or indolent, plump or fragile, if all are beautiful all are welcome. You, camerado, may incline towards a blonde, with hair touched with gold and eyes haunted by a living memory of the sky, small of stature, and with hands seductively white and delicate: I, on the other hand, may prefer a brunette, with hair lovely with the dusk and fragrance of twilight, with eyes filled with strange

lights and depths of shadow, tall, lissom, and with the nut-brown kisses of the sun just visible on cheek and neck, and bonnie deft hands. Or, it may be, I find Ideala in a sweet comeliness: a face and figure and mien and manner which together allure a male mind searching for the quietudes rather than for the exaltations of passionate life. You, however, may worship at another shrine, and seek your joy in austere beauty, or in that which seems wedded to a tragic significance, or that whose very remoteness lays upon you an irresistible spell. There be those who prefer Diana to Venus, who would live with Minerva rather than Juno: who would rather espouse Syrinx than Semele, and prefer the shy Arethusa to the somewhat heedless Leda. Who shall blame a man if he would rather take to wife Lucy Desborough than Helen of Troy: and has any one among us right to lift a stone against him who would bestow the "Mrs." at his disposal upon Dolly Varden rather than upon Cleopatra?

After all, are the poets and painters the right people to go to for instruction as to beauty? Most of them are disappointed married men. Every man loves three females: woman (that is, his particular woman), as he imagines her to be; woman, as he finds her;

and woman, carefully revised for an improbable new edition.

II

In the beginning, said a Persian poet, Allah took a rose, a lily, a dove, a serpent, a little honey, a Dead Sea apple, and a handful of clay. When He looked at the amalgam it was Woman. Then He thought He would resolve these constituents. But it was too late. Adam had taken her to wife, and humanity had begun. Woman, moreover, had learned her first lesson: conveyed in the parable of the rib. Thus early did the male imagination begin to weave a delightful web for its own delectation and advantage. When, after a time, the daughters of Eve convinced the sons of Adam that a system of Dual Control would have to be put into effect, there was much questioning and heartburning. Satan availed himself of the opportunity. He took man aside, and explained to him that woman had been reasonless and precipitate, that she had tempted him before she was ripe, and that he was a genial innocent and very much to be pitied. Further, he demonstrated that if she had only waited a little, all would have been well. But, as it was, the rose had a thorn, the lily had a ten-

dency to be fragile, the dove had not lost its timidity, the serpent had retained its guile, its fangs, and its poison, the honey was apt to clog, the Dead Sea apple was almost entirely filled with dust, and the clay was of the tough, primeval kind, difficult to blend with advantage, and impossible to eliminate.

From that day, says the Persian poet, whose name I have forgotten, man has been haunted by the idea that he was wheedled into a copartnery. In a word, having taken woman to wife, he now regrets that he committed himself quite so early to a formal union. From his vague regrets and unsatisfied longings, and a profound egotism which got into his system during his bachelor days in Eden, he evolved the idea of Beauty. This idea would have remained a dream if Satan had not interfered with the suggestion that it was too good to be wasted as an abstraction. So the idea came to be realised. There was much hearty laughter in consequence, in "another place." Seeing what a perilous state man had brought himself into, Allah had pity. He took man's conception of Beauty — which to His surprise was in several respects much superior to Eve — and, having dissipated it with a breath, rewove it into a hundred lovely ideals. Then, making

of the residue a many-coloured span in the heavens, He sent these back to Earth, each to gleam thenceforth with the glory of that first rainbow.

It is a fantasy. But let us thank that Eastern poet. Perhaps, poor dreamer, he went home to learn that unpunctual spouses must expect reproaches in lieu of dinner, or even, it may be, to find that his soul's Sultana had eloped with a more worldly admirer of Eve. Zuleika, if he found her, perhaps he convinced. For us he has put into words, with some prolixity and awkwardness no doubt, what in a vague way we all feel about the beauty of women.

For in truth there is no such abstraction as Womanly Beauty. Instead, there is the beauty of women.

Every man can pick and choose. There are as many kinds of women as there are of flowers: and all are beautiful, for some quality, or by association. It is well to admire every type. Companionship with the individual will thus be rendered more pleasing! As the late Maxime du Camp said somewhere: "In the matter of admiration, it is not bad to have several maladies." There are men who, in this way, are chronic invalids. Women are very patient with them.

I do not agree with an acquaintance of mine who avers that his predilections are climatic in their nature. If he is in Italy he loves the Roman contadina, or the Sicilian with the lissom Greek figure; if in Spain, he thinks flashing black eyes and coarse hair finer than the flax and sky-blue he admired so much in Germany; if in Japan, he vows with Pierre Loti that Madame Chrysanthème is more winsome than the daintiest Parisienne; if in Barbary, he forgets the wild-rose bloom and hillwind freshness of the English girl, whom, when he roams through Britain, he makes the Helen to his Paris, forgets for the sake of shadowy gazelle-eyes, for languorous beauty like that of the lotus on warm moonlight nights. I wonder where he is now. He has been in many lands. I know he has loved a Lithuanian, and passioned for a Swede: and when I last saw him, less than a year ago, he said his ideal was a Celtic *maighdeann*. Perhaps he is far distant, in that very Cathay which I remember his saying was a country to be taken on trust, as one accepts the actuality of the North Pole: if so, I am convinced he is humming blithely

"She whom I love at present is in China:
She dwells, with her aged parents,

In a tower of fine porcelain,
By the yellow stream where the cormorants are." *

This is too generously eclectic for me, who am a lover of moderation, and a monogamist by instinct. Nevertheless, I can appreciate this climatic variability. I am no stickler for the supremacy of any one type, of the civilised over the barbaric, of the deftly arrayed over the austerely ungarbed! With one of the authors of *Le Croix de Berny* I can say: "Dress has very little weight with me. I once admired a Granada gipsy whose sole costume consisted of blue slippers and a necklace of amber beads."

Nowadays, we have to admire the nude only in sculpture, and that antique. M. Bérenger in Paris, Mr. Horsley, R. A., and a Glasgow bailie have said so.

Well, well, it may be so. But there are unregenerate men among us. Perhaps this new madness of blindness will supersede the old intoxication. Truly, I am

"Oft in doubt whether at all
I shall again see Phœbus in the morning,
Or a white Naiad in a rippling stream—"

* "*Celle que j'aime à present, est en Chine;*
Elle demeure, avec ses vieux parents,
Dans une tour de porcelaine fine,
Au fleuve jaune où sont les cormorans."
(Théophile Gautier.)

but I have no doubt whatever that others will. Meanwhile we can dream of youth: the youth of the past, the eternal youth, and the hour-long youth we have known ourselves. It is one of the sunbright words. These five letters have an alchemy that can transmute dust and ashes into blossoms and fruit. For those who know this, the beauty of the past is linked to the present tense: the most ancient things live again, and the more keenly. *Antiquitas sæculi inventus mundi.*

Well, sufficient unto this present is the question of the nude! Let those who will, ignore it. Whatever these may say, there is always this conviction for loyal Pagans to fall back upon — in the words of George Meredith — "the visible fair form of a woman is hereditary queen of us."

III

What a blight upon ordered sequence in narrative, phrase dear to the grammarian, discursiveness is! Yet I cannot help it: to borrow from George Meredith on the subject of fair women, from Lucy Desborough and Rhoda Fleming to Clotilde von Rüdiger and Diana Warwick and Aminta Ormont, is as seductive as the sound of the sea when one

is panting on the inland side of a sand-dune. In sheer self-defence I must find an apothegm so good that it would be superfluous to go further. This is irrational perhaps: but then with Diana I find that "to be pointedly rational is a greater difficulty to me than a fine delirium." There are Fair Women, and fair sayings about fair women, in each of these ever delightful twelve novels. Epigrammatically, *The Egoist* and *Beauchamp's Career* would probably afford most spoil to the hunter: but here in *Richard Feverel* is the quintessential phrase for which we wait. "*Each woman is Eve throughout the ages.*"

This might be the motto for every Passionate Pilgrim. For, truly, to every lover the woman of his choice is another Eve. He sees in her the ideal prototype. It is well that this is so: otherwise there would be no poetry, no fiction, and scarce any emotional literature save passionate Malthusian tractates!

But now let me be frank. Out of all the pictured fair women I have ever seen is there one who has embodied my ideal of womanly beauty? This is a question that most of us put to ourselves, with the same apparent arrogance, as if any one individual's opinion had the least value for others, or had anything to do with the Beauty of Woman.

No. Though, in pictures, I have seen a few beautiful, and many lovely, and scores of comely and handsome women, in no instance did I encounter one of whom in any conceivable circumstances I could say "*There: she* is my Eve, past, present, and for ever!"

"I am always waiting," wrote Amiel, "for the woman and the work which shall be capable of taking entire possession of my soul, and of becoming my end and aim." Yes, with Stendhal, we all wait: and one man in a million is rewarded with "the woman," to one man in a generation comes "the work."

What is wanting? Must the glow of personal romance be present before a beautiful woman can embody for us the Beauty of Woman?

> "Araminta's grand and shrill,
> Delia's passionate and frail,
> Doris drives an earnest quill,
> Athanasia takes the veil;
> Wiser Phyllis o'er her pail,
> At the heart of all romance
> Reading, sings to Strephon's flail,
> 'Fate's a fiddler, Life's a dance.'"

Cannot Araminta and Delia be beautiful, though Strephon may prefer Phyllis? Or is beauty in women as incalculable a quantity as the delight men take in women's names?

There are names that stir one like a trumpet, or like the sound of the sea, or like the ripple of leaves: names that have the magic of moonlight in them, that are sirens whose witchery can in a moment enslave us. What good to give here this or that sweet name: each man has in him his own necromancy wherewith to conjure up vague but haunting-sweet visions. Equally, if all Fair Women of the Imagination or of Life have names we love, there are designations that seem like sacrilege, that grate, that excruciate. There is a deep truth in Balzac's insistence on the correspondence between character and nomenclature. Still, there are many debatable names. "Anna," for example, is not offensive, yet I "cannot away with it," though tolerant of "Annie." But hear what Mr. Henley has to say:—

"Brown is for Lalage, Jones for Lelia,
Robinson's bosom for Beatrice glows,
Smith is a Hamlet before Ophelia.
The glamour stays if the reason goes:
Every lover the years disclose
Is of a beautiful name made free.
One befriends, and all others are foes:
Anna's the name of names for me!"

* * * *

"Fie upon Caroline, Jane, Amelia—
These I reckon the essence of prose!—

Mystical Magdalen, cold Cornelia,
Adelaide's attitudes, Mopsa's mowes,
Maud's magnificence, Totty's toes,
Poll and Bet with their twang of the sea,
Nell's impertinence, Pamela's woes!
Anna's the name of names for me.

But to return: everywhere pictured Ideala has evaded me. It has been a vain quest, though again and again I have caught just a glimpse of her, a vanishing gleam, a fugitive glance. The other day I was startled by the sudden light in the face of Hoppner's "Miranda," though when I looked again I was no more than haunted by an impalpable suggestion. In the beauty of the flowing drapery, in the breadth of that sea frothing at her feet, somewhere there was an evanescent grace which belonged to Ideala. Yet it was not quite hers after all, any more than the indwelling beauty, seen perhaps only for a moment, in the eyes, or revealed in a momentary light upon the face, was hers — the beauty, the momentary light in *Miranda,* in the gipsy-beauty of her of the *Snake in the Grass,* in one or two other portraits of a more delicately refined loveliness, or of the higher beauty, that of the beautiful mind visible through the fair mask of the flesh. Long ago, says Thoreau in *Walden,* "I lost a

hound, a bay-horse, and a turtle dove, and am still on their trail." I think She whom we seek rides afar on that fleet horse, espied for ever by that flying dove, for ever pursued by that tireless hound.

No doubt it is absurd to expect to find Ideala, even among portraits of women who may have been her kindred in the eyes of one or two persons, who could discern not only the outward beauty, but the inner radiance. Moreover, the company is commonly not that amid which one would pursue one's quest. Diane de Poitiers, Nell Gwynne, Mrs. Jane Middleton, the Countess of Grammont, the Comtesse de Parabère, "Perdita," Lady Hamilton, Mlle. Hillsberg, Lady Ellenborough, Mrs. Grace Dalrymple Elliot, and Elizabeth Foster, Duchess of Devonshire, were one and all charming as well as beautiful women. But presumably Charles did not discern his soul's counterpart in Nell Gwynne, nor the Regent Philippe in "la belle Parabère," nor the amorous George in "Perdita," nor either Prince Schwartzenberg or the Arab Sheik in Lady Ellenborough.

In order to judge, one must know. We, who do not know these Fair Women of the past, cannot judge. We must each seek an Ideala of our own. After all, as some one

has said, women are like melons: it is only after having tasted them that we know whether they are good or not.

We must be content with some one short of Perfecta. Unequal unions are deplorable. Moreover, it is very unsatisfactory to emulate the example of the celebrated Parisian *bouquineur,* who worried through life without a copy of Virgil, because he could not succeed in finding the ideal Virgil of his dreams. Ideala is as the wind that cometh and goeth where it listeth. Rather, she may be likened to the Wind for ever fleeting along "that nameless but always discoverable road which leads the wayfarer to the forest of beautiful dreams."

Moreover, She may appear anywhere, at any time. Remember Campion's "She's not to one form tied." Possibly, even, she may be called Nell Gwynne; for to every Nell there will be a lover to whom she will be Helen.

"Helen, thy beauty is to me
Like those Nicean barks of yore,
That gently, o'er a perfumed sea,
The weary, wayworn wanderer bore
To his own native shore.

"Lo! in yon brilliant window niche,
How statue-like I see thee stand,

The agate lamp within thy hand!
Ah, Psyche, from the regions which
Are Holy Land!"

It is a pity that where a Helen is so evident to one passionate pilgrim, she should be merely Nell to the world in general. But so it is; and, alas! the very last person to perceive the connection with Psyche is often Nell herself. Poets get little gratitude, as a rule, for the glorification they effect. Poor bards! they are apt to address as Ideala those who would rather be called Nell, and dedicate their deepest life-music to a mistress who, while flattered, really understands neither the poetry nor the poet, and can be more eloquent over a gift of gloves than over a work of genius. Thus hath it ever been; doubtless thus it shall continue. As long as there are fair women, there will be strong men ready to lose their highest heritage for a mess of pottage. As among the innumerable kinds of flowers where the bee may roam and gather honey there is that flower of Trebizond whose fatal blooms allure the unwitting insect to madness or death, so among women there are some who irresponsibly lure men to sure calamity. Who was the man who said that fair women are fair demons

who make us enter hell through the door of paradise? Doubtless *he* loved a flower of Trebizond. Idealists, ponder!

Nevertheless, though we would not naturally seek Ideala among the Nell Gwynnes, it would be a mistake to rise to the high remote air where dwell the saints who have not yet transcended mortality. A touch of sin must be in that man whom we hail as brother, that women we greet as sister. There was shrewd worldly wisdom in the remark of a French prince, that, however virtuous a woman may be, a compliment on her virtue is what gives her the least pleasure. Concurrently we may take that instructive passage in Cunningham's *British Painters* where we learn how Hoppner complained of the painted ladies of Sir Thomas Lawrence; that they showed "a gaudy dissoluteness of taste, and sometimes trespassed on moral as well as professional chastity," while by implication he claimed for his own portraits purity of look as well as purity of style: with this result — "Nor is it the least curious part of this story, that the ladies, from the moment of the sarcasm of Hoppner, instead of crowding to the easel of him who dealt in the loveliness of virtue, showed a growing preference for the rival who

'trespassed on moral as well as on professional chastity.'"

Women should not be wroth with men because that each male, sound of heart and brain, is a Ponce de Leon. Parenthetically, let me add — on the authority of Arsène Houssaye! — that all the energies of Creation do not succeed in producing throughout the whole world one hundred *grandes dames* yearly. And how many of these die as little girls — how few attain to "la beauté souveraine du corps et de l'âme?" "Voilà," he adds — "voilà pourquoi la grande dame est une oiseau rare. Où est le merle blanc?" "The Quest of the White Blackbird": fair women, ponder this significant phrase. We all seek the Fountain of Youth, the Golden Isles, Avalon, Woman (as distinct from the fairest of women), Ideala, or whatever sunbright word or words we cap our quest with. If wives could but know it, they have more cause to be jealous of women who have never lived than of any rival "young i' the white and red." Yet, paradoxically, with a true man, a wife, if she be a true woman, need never turn her back upon the impalpable Dream; for, after all, it is her counterpart, a rainbow-phantom.

Fair women, *all* men are not travailing with

love of you! There are Galileos who would say *e pur se muove,* though Woman suddenly became *passée,* nay, though she became a by no means indispensable adjunct. It is even possible there are base ones among us who may envy the Australian god Pundjel, who has a wife whom he may not see!

Alas, Fair Women only laugh when they behold Man going solitary to the tune of

> "O! were there an island,
> Though ever so wild,
> Where women might smile, and
> No man be beguiled!"

IV

It is not often that picture-gallery catalogues contain either humour or philosophy. There is a naïve humour, a genial philosophy, in the prefatory note to that of a recent Exhibition. "As," so the note runs, "there are indeed certain pictures of Women, possibly more celebrated for their historical interest, their influence, or their wit, than for their beauty, some exception has been taken to the title of the Exhibition. The directors, however, do not know of any fixed standard by which such pictures can be judged, and, further, they believe that in the eyes of some

one person, at least, every woman has been considered fair."

Whereupon I hum to myself the quatrain from the old north-country nursery-ballad of "Rashin Coatie" —

> "There was a king and a queen,
> As mony ane's been;
> Few have we seen,
> As few may we see."

Alas! there are so many queens of beauty on the walls of picture galleries, and yet one's heart stays secure from any one of them! But, suddenly, I remember a favourite couplet, by Campion,

> "Beauty must be scorned in none,
> Though but truly served in one"—

and, having thought of and quoted that sweet singer, must needs go right through three stanzas of his, memorable even in the ever-new wealth of Elizabethan love-songs.

> "Give beauty all her right!
> She's not to one form tied;
> Each shape yields fair delight,
> Where her perfections bide:
> Helen, I grant, might pleasing be,
> And Ros'mond was as sweet as she.

"Some the quick eye commends,
Some swelling lips and red;
Pale looks have many friends,
Through sacred sweetness bred:
Meadows have flowers that pleasures move,
Though roses are the flower of love.

"Free beauty is not bound
To one unmovéd clime;
She visits every ground,
And favours every time.
Let the old lords with mine compare;
My Sovereign is as sweet and fair."

There; all that is to be said about Fair Women, or the Beauty of Women, is compressed into six short lines. This intangible beauty is a citizen of the world, and has her home in Cathay as well as Europe. No one age claims her, and Helen of Troy takes hands with Aspasia, and they smile across the years to Lucrezia Borgia and Diane de Poitiers, who, looking forward, see the lovely light reflected in la belle Hamilton; and so down to our own day. And then, once more, Eve individualised for ever and ever; a challenge to all the world to bring forward one sweeter and fairer than "my Sovereign."

In other words, "each woman is Eve throughout the ages." There are many Audreys, alas — indeed sometimes, within a

square mile even, there seems to be an epidemic of Audreys! — but a far-seeing Providence has created many Touchstones. So we will believe that in the eyes of at least one person each woman has been considered fair; though, to be truthful, "a man may, if he were of a fearful heart, stagger in this attempt," as saith the blithe-fool of Arden himself.

After all, these clowns and wenches in *As You Like It* are nearer the poetry of truth than that cynical prose of *fin-de-siècle* sentiment, of which this is an example: —

LADY (*looking at a sketch, then at the Artist*). "So: — this is your ideal woman?"

ARTIST. "It was."

LADY. "Then you have changed?"

ARTIST. "Yes. I *met* her."

As a matter of fact, men who have nothing of the ideal in them are, in the eyes of true women, as a sunless summer. These women, like Clara Middleton of "the fine-pointed brain," have a contempt for the male brain "chewing the cud in the happy pastures of unawakedness."

Women, plain or fair, do not readily forgive. Man should remember this, when he acts upon what he considers his hereditary right to joke upon the frailties of his enslaved

goddess. He is apt to think that they are reasonless in the matter of their looks, forgetful that marriage is a salve to all prenuptial display! They do not mind backhanded compliments: they will smile at Victor Hugo when he says that woman is a perfected devil; they have a caress in their heart for Gavarni when he whispers that one of the sweetest pleasures of a woman is to cause regret; and they take a malicious entertainment in the declaration of a man of the world like Langrée, that modesty in a woman is a virtue most deserving, since we men do all we can to cure her of it. But they will not forgive Montaigne himself when he affirms that there is no torture a woman would not suffer to enhance her beauty.

"Unfolded only out of the illimitable poem of Woman can come the poems of man."

Thus Walt Whitman. But he does not tell us how variously the poets scan that Poem. What would be the result of a plébiscite among civilised women themselves: if they were given by the Powers that Be the option to be beautiful, to be fascinating, or to be winsome? The woman who believes herself predestined to be a wife and a mother will

prefer the third: the born adventuress will choose the second: the least domestic will select the first. On the other hand, it might be the other way round. Who can tell? Woman is still the Dark Continent of man. If one were to live to the age of Methuselah, and act on the principle of *nulla dies sine linea,* with every line devoted to the chronicle of woman's nature, the volume would be behindhand even on the day of publication. A copiously margined and footnoted edition would be called for immediately. Even if by that time only one woman were left, there would be prompt need of an appendix. There would also, as a matter of fact, always be a St. Bernard to grumble: "Woman is the organ of the Devil"—a Michelet to say with a smile that she is the Sunday of man—a cynic to hint that love of her might be the dawn of marriage, but that marriage with her would be sunset of love—a poet to exclaim that she was the last priestess of the unknown.

"Feed me with metaphors," says a poet in a recent romance; "and above all with metaphors of Woman. I know none that do not make me love women more and more."

Did he know his Balzac? Somewhere in that vast repository of thoughts on men and

women I recollect this: "La Mort est femme, — mariée au genre humain, et fidèle. Où est l'homme qu'elle a trompé?"

Some day a woman will compile a little volume of women's thoughts about men. These will be interesting. Men will read some of them with the same amazed pain wherewith recently ennobled brewers and the like peruse articles on the abolition of hereditary aristocracy.

Here, for example, is one —

"The greatest merit of some men is their wife."

It was Poincelot, a man, who said this: but let a woman speak —

"Physical beauty in man has become as rare as his moral beauty has always been."

Once more —

"It is not the weathercock that changes: it is the wind."

Since the days of Troy — or of Lilith — men have delighted in calling women weathercocks.

After all, we have been told many times that one of the principal occupations of men is to divine women: but it was a wise philosopher who added that women prefer us to say a little evil of them rather than say nothing of them at all.

V

We are all agreed now, let us say, that there is no such thing as an universally accepted standard of beauty. There is not even an accepted standard of beauty among those who admire the same type. To the most favoured dreamer Ideala will still come in at least three-fold guise, as those three lovely sisters of the Rushout family whom, not Cosway, but, like him, one of the finest of miniaturists has preserved for our delight. There are a million villages as fair as the one in which we were born, but for us there is only one village. When we quote "Sweet Auburn, loveliest village of the plain," we have one particular locality in our mental vision, as no doubt the poet of the *Song of Solomon* had when he sang, "Come, my beloved, let us go forth into the fields; let us lodge in the villages." Doubtless, too, he had one particular beloved in view, veiled behind his bardic rhapsody. Each of us has a particular Eve behind the phantom of an ideal type.

Of course there are both "villages" and "Eves" that exist only in the mind. There are dreamers who prefer either when most unsubstantial. "Ma contrée de dilection,"

says the Flemish novelist Eekhoud, "n'existe pour aucun touriste, et jamais guide ou médecin ne la recommendera." Some, too, having found an Eve, will crave for her isolation from the rough usage of the common day, lest she fall from her high estate. They are not altogether foolish who can do so, and can say with a young living poet: —

> "I fear lest time or toil should mar —
> I fear lest passion should debase
> The delicacy of thy grace.
> Depart; and I will throne thee far,
> Will hide thee in a halcyon place
> That hath an angel populace;
> And ever in dreams will find thy face,
> Where all things pure and perfect are,
> Smiling upon me like a star."

This is a temper beyond most of us, who are all hedonists by instinct, and in the bodily not the spirtual sense. Flaubert the man was not representative of us, his weaker fellows. "Je n'ai jamais pu emboîter Vénus avec-Apollon," as he wrote to George Sand, when she advised him to try domestic happiness or at least a little flirtation.

Besides, there are men to whom the element of strangeness, of something bizarre perhaps, even of something barbaric, is of primary appeal. The very quintessence, the

crown, the aloebloom of this kind of art, is it not Leonardo's Monna Lisa del' Gioconda? Perhaps, even more convincingly, in that drawing of his in the Academia della Belle Arti, in Venice, of a beautiful girl, with side-long rippling hair, delicately crowned with vine leaves, with that enigmatical smile on her face and still more enigmatical smile in her eyes — a type finer even than this Milanese beauty? It is a type that does not appeal to many men, but, where its appeal is felt at all, it is irresistible. There is all the seduction of nameless peril in these mysterious faces which apparently tell nothing and yet are so full of subtle meaning and repressed intensity. How else, again, are we to account for the fascination of such an one as Lady Ellenborough, for instance, "the imperious Jane," immortalised by Sir Thomas Lawrence?

Surely it must be admitted that even *his* art does not bestow beauty upon "that witch." Doubtless she had a smile that could unlock prison doors, eyes that could melt a Marat or Danton, a mien and manner, an expression and charm, that made her irresistible to most men. But, on canvas, one can see no more than that she looks like a woman who had immense vitality. The

lady's story is certainly a remarkable one. Miss Jane Elizabeth Digby must have been a vivacious damsel, even while still a schoolgirl, and, in the manner of her time, learning to spell execrably. She was one of the fortunate women born with the invisible sceptre. If she had been an actress, she would have been the empress of the stage; if she had been a demimondaine, she would have been the Aspasia of her day; if she had been a queen, she would have been a Catherine of Russia. Again, she was one of those impetuous people who have no time to be virtuous. We know next to nothing of her girlhood, yet we may be sure that she set her nursemaid a bad example in flirtation, and shocked her governess, if she had one, by many abortive intrigues. No doubt her friends thought that she would settle down and be good when she became the wife of the Earl of Ellenborough. They argued that what a high-spirited Miss Digby would do, a proud-spirited Countess of Ellenborough would disdain. But Miss Jane Elizabeth had, she considered, come into the world to enjoy herself in her own way. Not long after her marriage she permitted the too marked attention of Prince Schwartzenberg, and this brought about a duel between that gentleman and

Lord Ellenborough. Neither duellist was killed: and the only result was that not long afterwards the lady made up her mind to go off with Prince Schwartzenberg. After a time Lord Ellenborough died, and then his widow married the Prime Minister of Bavaria. That a genuine passion for this strange woman animated the Bavarian noble is clear, not only from his having offered marriage to a lady of such doubtful reputation, but from the tragic circumstance that, when she tired of him in turn, and set forth once more on her dauntless quest of man, he committed suicide. She had several episodes between this date and that when she found herself in Syria, and espoused to an Arab Sheik of Damascus. It would be incredible that she died in his arms in the desert, were it not for the additional fact that she was at that moment contemplating an elopement with her handsome dragoman. Miss Digby was, certainly, not one of those "beauties" towards whom — as Gautier advises — one should go straight as a bullet. Instead of our seizing "her by the tip of the wing, politely but firmly like a gendarme," she would be much more likely to seize us. She was unreasonable, we will admit, but then, with Mme. de Girardin, she might exclaim

"Be reasonable! which means: No longer hope to be happy." Obviously she was of those essentially feline women of whom Edgar de Meilhan speaks when he says that "tigers, whatever you may say, are bad companions." "With regard to tigers," he adds, "we tolerate only cats, and then they must have velvet paws." Neither Lord Ellenborough, nor the Bavarian Prime Minister, nor the Arab Sheik, nor any other of her special friends, would deny that a little more velvet on the paws of the sprightly Jane Elizabeth would have been an advantage.

There are always women of this kind, who exercise an imperious and inexplicable sway over the male imagination, or, to be more exact, over the imagination of certain males. It is no use to reason with the bondager. With the King in *Love's Labour's Lost* he can but reply

> "Yet still is the moon, and I the man.
> The music plays . . ."

We are fortunate, possibly, who never hear this music, a bewildering strain from the heart of the Venusberg. Rather that "silver chiming," which is "the music of the bells of wedded love." Poets are terrible romanticists in the matter of the affections. They are

the most faithful of lovers to some impossible She: but they are apt to have wandering eyes in the ordinary way of life. Too many behave, even on the threshold of the Ideal, in the reprehensible manner of Samuel Pepys when that famous chronicler and incurable old pagan found himself in church one fine day. "Being wearied," he writes, "turned into St. Dunstan's Church, where I heard an able sermon of the minister of the place; and stood by a pretty modest maid, whom I did labour to take by the hand; but she would not, but got further and further from me; and, at last, I could perceive her to take pins out of her pocket to prick me if I should touch her again — which, seeing, I did forbear, and was glad I did spy her design. And then I fell to gaze upon another pretty maid in a pew close to me, and she on me; and I did go about to take her by the hand, which she suffered a little and then withdrew. So the sermon ended." It is to be feared that Pepys had not realised that counsel of perfection, which may be given in the guise of a phrase remembered from *Evan Harrington*, — "Both Ale and Eve seem to speak imperiously to the love of man. See that they be good, see that they come in season."

VI

"But how to know beauty in woman when one sees it, that is the question," said to me a disappointed bachelor friend the other day. "If there is no absolute beauty, and if the type is so much distributed in various guises, how is a man who cares only for dark women to see the insignia of beauty in those who have red hair or yellow, and blue eyes, and in the matter of complexion are like curds and cream stained with roses?"

Alas for these uncertain ones, there is nothing for it but a steady course of gratifying and educating the Appreciative Faculties! To my querist I replied in the words of Gautier as Edgar de Meilhan: "Go straight as a bullet towards your beauty; seize her by the tip of her wing, politely but firmly, like a gendarme."

But is there for you, for me, a fundamental charm? That charm, surely, must be distinction. With the Egoist, "my thoughts come to this conclusion, that, especially in women, distinction is the thing to be aimed at." This, alone, is what survives, perhaps all that ever lived, in the portraits of the "beauties" of a bygone day. Then, too, it must be kept in mind that the painter, even

more than the poet, is a born sycophant. He loves the sweet insincerities of the plausibly impossible. Most of us are apt to be deceived by the innuendoes of anecdote, the flatteries of rumour, the glamour of the Past, the mirage of history. Take, for example, Botticelli's well-known "La Bella Simonetta," the lady whom Giuliano de Medici made his mistress because of her winsome beauty. "La Bella Simonetta:" there is magic in the name: it is a sweet sound echoing down the corridors of memory. Alessandro Filipepi painted her before the greater name of Sandro Botticelli became a mockery among the ungodly who railed at Savonarola and his teachings. Angelo Politian and Pulci wedded her loveliness to lovely words, and . . . whose pulse, now, would quicken because of la bella Simonetta? Even through the ingenuity of Sandro's art, a quite ordinary damsel confronts us.

Again, take the acknowledged Fair Women of our own country and of a time nearer our own: two types so popular as Lely's Countess of Grammont and Van Dyck's Countess of Sutherland.

While it is easy to understand how Elizabeth Hamilton became "la belle Hamilton" at the Court of Charles II., and had more

offers of marriage than the number of years she had lived, till, in the third year of the Restoration, she gave her hand to the celebrated wit and courtier, the Comte Philiberte de Grammont, most of us doubtless would find it difficult to discover that "fundamental charm" we hoped to see. I could believe all that her brother Anthony could tell of her beauty and winsomeness, and have no doubt that Count Philibert was a very lucky man. But, for myself, I realise that even had I been a member of that wicked, laughing, delightful, reprehensible Cavalier Court, and a favourite of fortune in the matter of advantages, I doubt if I would have been one of the five-and-twenty suitors of "la belle Hamilton." Certainly, as things are, one might be Japhet in search of a wife and still not be allured, even in random fancy, by this particular Fair Woman.* Alas, there is yet another charm which allures men when Beauty is only an impossible star; in the words of the anonymous poet of "Tibbie Fowler o' the Glen,"

> "Gin a lass be e'er sae black
> An' she hae the pennysiller,
> Set her up on Tinto tap,
> The win'll blaw a man 'till her."

*Marryat's Japhet sought a father, but this is not a misapplication to boggle at!

It was not the fair Elizabeth's "pennysiller," however, that was the attraction, though she did have what the Scots slyly call "advantages."

Nevertheless, it is clear she must have in her beauty something that appeals to many minds and in different epochs. The fastidious nobles and wits of the Restoration admired her; Sir Peter Lely expended his highest powers in painting her; his portrait of her has long been the gem of the famous series known as the "Windsor Beauties," and at Hampton Court she is ever one of the most popular of the ladies of the Stuart *régime.*

Probably the Countess of Sutherland, of whom Van Dyck, it is thought, so much enjoyed the painting, must have been more winsome in looks, as she was certainly superior in graces of mind and spirit. This is the famous Lady Dorothy Sidney, daughter of the second Earl of Leicester and wife of that Lord Sunderland, the first of his title, who fell fighting under the Royalist flag at the Battle of Newbury; not to be remembered for this now, however, but as the "Sacharissa" of Edmund Waller's love-poems. True, Waller, who was for generations one of the most popular, and for a few decades *the* most popular of all English poets, is now almost as little

read as the least notable of his contemporaries. He aspired to be England's Petrarch, and like Lovelace with one flawless lyric, or like Blanco White, or the French poet, Félix Arvers, with a single sonnet, is now among the immortals by virtue only of one little song. Possibly Laura had as good reason for discounting the passion of her Petrarco as Dorothy Sidney had for qualification of the prolonged homage of Waller. Both "My deathless Laura" and "My divine Sacharissa" married another person than the lover who gave immortality in verse; married, and had children, and occasionally perhaps glanced at the Sonnets to Laura, or the Poems addressed to Sacharissa. Not only, indeed, did Lady Dorothy choose Lord Sunderland in preference to Waller, but as a widow she even preferred the practical poetry of a Mr. Robert Smythe's wooing to that which in her youth she had had so much experience of in verse. Fair and comely she seems in Van Dyck's portrait of her, though not the Sacharissa of whom one had dreamed. Was it this attractive English lady who was the inspirer of "Go, lovely Rose?" The thought suggests the strange revelation it would be, if we were to be entertained with a series of authentic likenesses of all the beautiful women we have

loved or dreamed of across the ages. "A Dream of Fair Women"; what would Helen say to it, or Cleopatra, or Guenevere, or, for that matter, Eve herself? What a desert of disillusion would exist between the catalogue-entry, "Helen, daughter of Leda queen to King Tyndarus, who became the wife of Menelaus, and subsequently went abroad with Paris: commonly known as Helen of Troy," and the quoted motto-lines from Marlowe:—

> "Is this the face that launched a thousand ships
> And burned the topless towers of Ilium?"

Again, fancy the astonishment and chagrin of Mr. Swinburne, if he passed one by one the actual counterparts of the ladies of the "Masque of Queen Bersabe," from Herodias to that Alaciel whose eyes "were as a grey-green sea," and found that he could not recognise one of those vignettes in red or white flame which he wrought so wondrously in the days of his youth! Semiramis, in truth, may have been but a handsome woman with a temper, the Queen of Sheba nothing more than distinctly pretty, and Sappho passionate but plain.

But there is a difference between the praisers of Royal beauty and those who hymn ladies whom they can also approach when the lyre is

laid aside. We believe in Laura and Sacharissa and Castara, and many other fair dames beloved of the sons of Apollo. If for nothing else than because she inspired the loveliest of all Waller's songs, we would look with homage at this Fair Woman whom the genius of Van Dyck has given us a glimpse of:—

"Go, lovely Rose,
Tell her that wastes her time and me,
That now she knows
When I resemble her to thee
How sweet and fair she seems to be.

'Tell her that's young,
And shuns to have her graces spied,
That hadst thou sprung
In deserts where no men abide,
Thou must have uncommended died.

'Small is the worth
Of beauty from the light retired;
Bid her come forth,
Suffer herself to be desired,
And not blush so to be admired.

"Then die, that she
The common fate of all things rare
May read in thee,
How small a part of time they share
Who are so wondrous sweet and fair."

After all, perhaps the secret of our delight in

these Ladies of "the glowing picture and the living word" is this: that, even of the fairest, the true lover can say, with the poet of "The Moonstar" —

> "Lady, I thank thee for thy loveliness,
> Because my lady is more lovely still."

VII

To return to the Fair Women of Painting. Here, alas, there remain always one or two unforgivable disillusions. To begin with, there is the inevitable Eve; generally either a matronly person discomfortably garbless, or a self-conscious studio model. There is Helen of Troy, gloriously immortal in the hexameters of Homer and the heroics of Marlowe, but made ridiculous by innumerable painters. And, to come home, there is our own Helen: Mary of Scotland. Is there indeed a portrait of the Queen of Scots in existence which any Mariolater could have pleasure in looking at? There are certain women we never wish to see except in mental vision. Some readers may recollect the Sapphic fragment preserved by Hephaestion, which tells us simply that "Mnasidica is more shapely than the tender Gyrinno." Fortunate Mnasidica, who has haunted the minds of men ever since, through

never once having been enslaved by sculptor or painter of any period! Beautiful Shapeliness, that none can gainsay! Painters who give us Helens and Cleopatras and Queen Maries seem to be quite unaware of the heavy handicap they put upon their productions. And so it goes without saying, that all portraits of Mary of Scotland are disappointing, from that of the earliest anonymous limner to that of Mr. Lavery. There is not one of us *blasé* enough to withstand the cruel disillusion of what, by way of adding insult to injury, is called "authentic likeness." Poor Mary! She has paid bitterly in innumerable portraits for the wonderful rumour of her beauty in her own day. No man who respects himself should commit *lèse majesté* by ungracious comment before any canvas of this pictorially much misrepresented Queen. It does indeed make one glad that a few others world-famous for their beauty were spared the ignominy of pictorial immortality.

If all Fair Women of Picture-world were brought together, it would be made quite clear that the one thing which in a thousand instances escapes the painter is expression. Expression is the morning glory of beauty. A few men in all ages have understood this, Leonardo and the great Italians pre-eminently.

It is to the credit of many of the most eccentric "impressionists" that they have wearied of conventional similitude, and striven to give something of the real self of the person whose likeness is being transferred to canvas. These, with Bastien Lepage, have realised that "we must change our ways if any of our work is to live." "We must try," adds that notable artist of whom Mrs. Julia Cartwright has given us so excellent a biography, "we must try to see and reproduce that inmost radiance which lies at the heart of things, and is the only true beauty, because it is the life."

That inmost radiance! To discern it, to apprehend it, to reveal it to others, that is indeed the quintessential thing in all art.

But the spectator must not only make allowances for the painter of a portrait; he must himself exercise a certain effort. In a word, he must bring the glow of imagination into play, he must let his mental atmosphere be nimble and keenly receptive. He must remember that while portraiture may have verisimilitude of a kind, it can very rarely simulate that loveliest thing in a woman's beauty — expression. He must discern in the canvas a light that is not there. He must see the colour come and go upon the face, must see the eyes darken or gleam, the lips move, the

smile just about to come forth: and, if possible, the inner radiance that, in many vivid and fine natures, seems to dwell upon the forehead, though too fugitive ever to be caught, save as it were for a moment unawares.

Fragments From the Lost Journals of Piero Di Cosimo

FRAGMENTS FROM THE LOST JOURNALS OF PIERO DI COSIMO*

I

Before I went to Rome with my master Cosimo many strange things happened. No perilous or untoward incidents befell me, it is true, but I was ever so curious in the byways of life that each day brought me something whereat to marvel greatly. It was ever so with me. Life itself is the supreme mystery: whoso fathoms that will solve the whole secret that has puzzled the wisest men of all time. Yet the more I think (and what a strain this endless thinking is — thinking, thinking, thinking!) the more I realise that there can be no discovery for any man save the revelation that the world exists for him only. What I mean is clear, though peradventure to some it might seem either a sport in words, an untimely folly, or to others a dark saying, such as the occult wisdom of those soothsayers and astrologers who, I am well assured, play upon the ignorance of the

*Doubtless the Journal of Piero di Cosimo, or certain portions of it, must have been known to Vasari. His description, certainly, of the Car of Death, closely tallies with Piero's own.

uneducated. It is this: that whatsoever this world has, behind its veil, as it were; such hidden beauty or strangeness or terror is only to be seen of those eyes which bring their own power of seeing. Children and many ignorant country-people believe, that the fogs and rains which the autumnal equinox bringeth do indeed obliterate the stars from the obscured heavens: not knowing that their shining is a thing apart, and as far removed from the vanities of this earth as the virtues of the most Blessed Virgin Mother are from the petty goodnesses and shortcomings of womankind in this world — and most certainly from those of the ladies of Florence, who seem to me to have much resemblance to those flighty insects which hover in still noons and at sundown by Arno-side, having all the characteristics of these, but lacking in the most welcome, that they perish speedily, even if they survive their long day from starsetting to moonrise. But wiser persons, to whom the processes of nature are, in their superficial aspects, not in any wise strange, know well the foolishness of such surmises about the disappearance of heavenly bodies because of the rising of earthly mists and vapours. And so is it with the more occult world of thought. One must have the eye of faith as well as the eye of the

body. One must know that there is light beyond darkness, life beyond death, spirit beyond clay, just as the educated know that the same stars which we saw yesternight still whirl their silver spheres through the upper spaces, whether mists and darkness intervene or the equally obscuring splendour of the sun. But over and above this there is a further vision which a few have. This sight brings to the mind and thence to the soul what is beyond the extremest visual ken. Men so gifted are the world's philosophers. They see not merely the fixity of the stars and the mutability of the mists and darkness, but the causes of these obscurities: and they apprehend also the laws whereby the stars exist and scatter their remote influences upon the tides of life, whether these be of the waters of ocean, or of the sap in trees and plants, or of the hot or gelid blood in the living things of the world, from the lizard and the callous newt to man himself. And yet again there are some who have a still deeper sight. These are they who are the passionate students of life. But of what avail is it that one telleth unto another his interpretation, if the other understand not also something of the occult meanings, the lost language, of which it is the halting translation? There is no salve to our undying

curiosity save that which is found of ourselves. Therefore is it why I, for one, have long sought diligently of her, Madonna Natura — Natura Benigna or Natura Maligna? — my one mistress; and how I shall ever so continue, even as I have done from my youth onward.

My youth! Ah! I was young then when I started with good Master Cosimo for the court of Pope Sixtus in that near and yet far-off Rome. I have already, earlier in these journals, written of my lonely but not unhappy boyhood, but now I cannot help recalling those bygone days. Here is a letter which Cosimo Rosselli, my good master, my very father, wrote to me, now years agone. It is already stained with some chemic dissolution: as the world is with the stain of mortality: as *I* am, now that I am sere as one of those October chestnut-leaves I brought home with me the other day from that deep glade of Vallombrosa I love so well.

"My ever-beloved Piero," so runs the dear familiar hand, "the tears are in my eyes today, and for two causes. This afternoon, after I had finished painting — and, alas! my craft is not what it was — I went forth to sun myself in the gardens of the Medici, having at all times the entry thereto. There, just as I

was about to leave, owing to a twilight wind, somewhat premature and cold, coming out of the greenness of the cypress boughs, I heard a sound as of some one sobbing. It had such bitter distress in it that my heart ached. After a brief time of uncertainty I beheld, quite close, and leaning against a very ancient yew, an old man, so wearily a wreck of life that he seemed rather a human-like excrescence of the tree than a fellow creature. But the crackling of a cone or twig beneath my feet aroused him, and he passed at once from the semblance of dismal death to the reality of a yet more dismal life. He was about to make haste away, as speedily as his age and infirmities would permit, and not without an angry and half-defiant irritation at my unwitting intrusion, such as, I bethought me, betokened some rankling memory of better days, when he stumbled over one of the two sticks whereby he aided his feeble gait. I ran forward to assist him, and who think you, Piero, I recognised? None other than that true and great painter whom you have so often admired, Sandro Botticelli! Ah, how it made my tears well to my eyes. But though he knew me, he would have none of me. I besought him by old friendship, by the memory of our comradeship at Rome, when he and I and Domen-

ico Ghirlandajo, and Luca of Cortona, and Piero Perugino, all wrought together for the Papal award. He laughed once, but bitterly; and taunted me, by asking if I had yet turned my pictures into a jeweller's stock; alluding therein to the method whereby I gained the Pope's prime favour, by the excessive gilding of my work, which made his Holiness believe it to be superior to the productions of better men — (a matter, Piero, I once took pride in, but am now ashamed of): but, on my silence, he turned away as though penitent before an old friend. '*Mio caro amico, mio maestro carissimo,*' I began, when he brusquely interrupted me, and cried '*Ecco!* Cosimo Rosselli, I am Alessandro Filipepi, the son of Mariano Filipepi, of Florence, and have nought to do with the vain dabbler in painted follies whom men call Botticelli. You knew me of old, and may call me Sandro if you will, but not that other name. Shall my tears and my bitter repentance never wash out those days of sinful vanity!' To the which heart-wrung cry I replied: 'I knew you had thrown away brush and pencil, *Sandro mio,* and that you had become a Piagnone,* but I never believed, I cannot now believe, that you, *you,* the master Bot-

*That is, of the bigoted sect of Fra Girolamo Savonarola.

ticelli — nay, you *must* let me say it — can forget your art. How well I remember your saying to Ghirlandajo, that work was good but beauty was better, as the soul is lovelier than even the most fair body. You cannot have forgotten that, nor how you once told Luca Signorelli that pure colour was like God, for the very being of God is pure music, and pure colour is but the visible and beautiful tranced body of music.' Whereupon he sighed, looked at me long and earnestly; then, muttering only, 'I am well, I am well, I want for nought,' made me sign of farewell, and went on his way. But for hours afterward, ay and oft since, methought I heard that bitter, miserable sob where the yew and cypress shadows were.

"And the other cause of my weeping to-day, though rather a soft summer rain, such as falls from my white lilac (where the young thrush revolves his song oftentimes leisurely, but again with such a marvellous swift joy and sweetness as to make me wonder at God's grace to these creatures of a springtide), rather such a rain I say than the sterner tears which I shed earlier over my unhappy Botticelli.

"For I came by chance, dear son, upon an early and a strange letter of thine, when thou

wert not yet in thy fifteenth year. How keenly it recalled those bygone days! I seemed once again to see thee, ever studious, and apart from thy fellows, and oftentimes rapt in strange imaginings. Fond, indeed, thou wert then as now of remote places, and of all things fantastic, and of solitude; a dreamy youth, moreover, wont to reply vaguely to questions of common import. And in this letter of thine, writ as I say when thou were not yet in thy fifteenth year, thou speakest strangely for a youth. 'The bale of life is so bitter that one hath perforce to occupy one's-self with such diversion as is offered by the strange, fantastic, the terrible.' What manner of boy is it who writeth thus? Again: 'I saw to-day a cloud of those smoke-like balls of seed blown from a field of dandelions: how beautiful they were, how exquisite their dalliance with the light wind, how perfect each delicate part — nothing out of heaven more wondrous light and aërial! All were blown upon a rotting dunghill, amid whose indiscriminate filth and stench were perishing butterflies, and some stained apple-blossoms, and voracious beetles and centipedes and other horrible insects, with worms, unwieldy and overgorged, rejoicing in corruption. And when I went home and fell into a dream, I

was sore perplexed whether I had seen all this, or had been but deliberating upon dear ambitions, and fair hopes, and human life, and the end thereof, and the immortality of the worm.' Ah, Piero, Piero, as thou were then, so art thou now; men say strange things of thy wayward life, though they praise thy genius. And the ending of thy letter, how sad it is! 'But thee, Cosimo Rosselli, my master, whom I love, can deep affection save thee from the ills of life? If so, thou art saved indeed!'

"And now, dear Piero, though I have seen nought of thee for long, we seem to be closelier drawn one to the other. Wilt thou not come and visit one who, whatsoever men idly say against thee, will ever love thy person as he reveres thy genius. Thou knowest that I am thine in comradeship and love, COSIMO ROSSELLI."

. . . . . .

They say that I live more as a wild beast than as a man: because I bar my doors against the idle and the over curious; eat, only when I am an-hungered; will not have my garden digged, nor the fruit-trees pruned; will not haunt the streets, or the taverns, or the guest-rooms, nor talk much and eagerly of matters that concern me not at all. So be it. Perhaps the wild beast is none the less beloved of

nature than the foolish human babbler. Why should I eat save when I would? Why not be solitary, when solitude is my festival? Why have my garden digged or my fruit-trees pruned, when to me the pleasure is greater to see the branches trail upon the ground, to behold the vines grow in their own way (as the human fool will not do, but persuadeth himself to ancestral follies, and conventions of outworn usage). Nature hath heed of her offspring. She hath birds to feed off these grape clusters, whether they be high and wind-swayed, or lie all ruined in the mould; butterflies, too, and moths, that haunt the sugared ooze upon over-ripe fruit; and flame-like wasps darting hither and thither, with keen knives cutting the purple skins; and the larvæ of many insects, and caterpillars and grey slugs and worms — these hath she all to feed, from my vines, as well as me. I am but one of these: but not so happy, because I think; not so wise, because I hope.

. . . . . .

Last night, very late (how white the shining of the moon upon the flood or Arno, and how deathlike the city in its silence, though joys and woes, and passionate hopes and more passionate despairs quivered, like exposed nerves, beneath the cold, calm exterior), on

my homeward way from Vallombrosa, I stopped at the house of Antonio del Monte, the naturalist. Walking along the chestnut glades, hours before, and wondering if ever painter would be born who would be able to paint *living nature,* and not but our dull dream of her (yet, in my vanity, thinking of that landscape which I painted for Pope Sixtus, when I went to Rome with Cosimo Rosselli, the one which gained me so much praise and so many commissions) : wondering also, in my strange uplifted ecstasy, if in any other world — if such there be, as I shrewdly suspect, among all those stars and planets overhead, despite what the Prior said to me about the evil and perilous thoughts of the excommunicated and already damned — wondering then if there be any more beautiful than this, with such infinities of mercy and delight for us, and indeed for all living things, I beheld somewhat that struck me as with a chill of fever. Overhead I saw a hawk, motionless as though painted against a dome of blue. It fell suddenly, many a score of paces — how many I could not say: then hung hovering; and all in a moment crashed upon a hen-partridge cowering over her chicks, and spilt the blood from the cleft head upon the wheat-stacks close by. And further, scarce fifty yards away

from where I stood, a fierce stoat crept nigher and nigher to a rabbit, which crouched trembling, giving forth a strange choking sob at times, and at the last sprang upon it and drove its teeth into the rabbit's skull. And further, I saw a sparrow-hawk on a fir-bough, tearing a young thrush to pieces, and scattering the bloodied feathers to right and left. And further, I saw a dead and rotten branch fall and crush a white bloom of lilies on the sward underneath. And further, I saw at my feet a small but agile insect, striped like a wasp, that ran backward and sideward as easily as forward, and it waylaid a tender yellow moth and nipped its head off and devoured it. Then a passion came into my heart, and I went away with my soul sick within me. I laughed at the beauty of the world, and cursed the mercy thereof. And as I passed the village at the foot of the hill I heard a man, blaspheming, strike his wife with savage cruelty; and the cry somewhere of a child wailing in pain. And when I told all to Antonio del Monte, he laughed. He said Nature was a beast of prey. And I — I — have loved Nature, have worshipped her! The end of idolaters is death within death.

. . . . . .

I remember well — it was after my first car-

nival in Rome — that an idea of a new and striking, albeit fantastic, masquerade, came into my mind. Yet it was not there but in Florence that I fulfilled it; and many years later. I was in great favour then with the gay Florentine youth, ever alert to novelties as to fierce deeds: they prized me for my invention in designing pleasurable surprises. Of a truth, the masquerades became new things altogether, after my dispositions were approved and carried into effect. Thenceforth they became triumphal processions, with men and horses gorgeously and strangely apparelled, and with wild or joyous music. It was a fine sight indeed, when, along the flower-strewn streets, young men (nude, or with leopard or tiger skins thrown about them, and garlanded with roses and lilies) rode upon foam-white stallions, these snorting through blood-red nostrils or neighing with hoarse clangours that rang against the black marble and basalt of the Florentine palaces! The sun shone upon the ivory skins of the men and the blanched milk-white steeds, and upon the trodden flowers, all red and white and yellow (that gave up an indescribable languorous and most sweet smell, as though the very soul of spring were dying there and passing away in forlorn fragrances), and upon the gay crowd, so brightly

and variously clad, and upon the beautiful fair women — many with wind-lifted hair and loosened bodices, and breasts that gleamed like globed water-lilies: the froth and foam, these, of the carnival-tide — laughing, and throwing those deep blood-red roses which are called Hearts o' Love, and wearing cream-hued and scarlet scarfs, twined round and trailing from the whitest of arms. And not less striking the processional array by night. Down the dark streets tramped the white horses, their riders now in gleaming armour, or fantastically garbed like chieftains of the Magyars or of the barbaric East. Two by two the riders went, and betwixt each couple not fewer than two-score ten stalwart men on foot, each waving a burning torch in one hand and carrying an unsheathed sword in the other, so that it caught and flashed forth a hundred lights. The horses themselves were a sight to see, in their rich accoutrements! Thereafter came a high car, garlanded with flowers and draperies and many rare devices. And all this to the laughter of men and women, the neighing of the stallions, the clanking of weapons, the sputtering of the torches, the shrill shrieks of Greek fifes, and the furious challenging blare of fivescore brazen trumpets! Ay, these were

goodly sights, though none equalled my Masquerade of Death, which is none other than the idea whereof I wrote a little ago: and of which men speak eagerly to this day, some with pleasant awe and dainty shudderings, others crossing themselves and muttering of devilish imaginations and Anti-Christ and papal maledictions.

I made my Car of Death in such secrecy in the Hall of the Pope, that none — no! not one — saw it aforehand. Then I made all arrangements, not only in mine own privacy, but wheresoever the procession should pass by; and these arrangements included the way itself, for I had special purpose to fulfil. And all who gave me of their service did so under a bond of secrecy, for after a while it became impossible to hide, from some at least of my assistants, either the parts or the whole of my scheme. There were two of my pupils who were of special service to me, both named Andrea. The one is still called Andrea di Cosimo: the other, a greater than his master, is known throughout all the lands northward of Rome, and even to France, as Andrea del Sarto. He was brought to me by my friend Gian' Barile, the Florentine painter, as a youth of exceeding promise; and I came to love him, almost as the good Cosimo Rosselli loved me.

He was ever a Passionate of art, from the days when he spent his leisure hours staring at the frescoes by Leonardo and Michel-Angelo in this very Hall of the Pope where I made my Car of Death. Rumours have reached me in mine old age that Andrea del Sarto, whom I see no more (whom do I see, I, Piero di Cosimo, "the mad painter," lonely as the falling star that last night swept the circuit of the heavens, and flashed into an oblivion of darkness beyond human ken?) — rumours, I say, have reached me that Andrea declareth my Procession of Death symbolised the return of the Medici. This is false. It is one to me whether the Medici feed upon the taxes of the Florentines, or upon those of any alien city. My device was of fantastical delight and a brooding imagination; and I have thought of stranger things still, but have scarce dared even to suggest them.

Thus was it, then, in the height of the Carnival. My great triumphal car, instead of being drawn by prancing horses and gaily decorated, was yoked to black buffaloes, each of sombre and terrible seeming, with horns overlaid with whitest plaster, and with eyes made hollowly red and burning with virulent pigments. The car itself was all hung in black sweeping draperies, gloomful as a star-

less and moonless night with imminence of rain; very dolorous to look upon; and yet not the less so because, every here and there, painted with whitely gleaming dead men's bones and broad crosses. High up on the car sat the gigantic figure of Death himself, dreadful of aspect, and holding in one outstretched hand his ever thirsting and hungering scythe. Beneath him, huddled round the huge throne whereon he sat, were dismal tombs, blank and awful. Before the slow-moving car and lowering buffaloes, and after it likewise, rode a great number of the dead on horseback, all singing in a trembling voice the Miserere. The sight made many quake, and some who laughed broke into sobs. And at those places where, in former carnivals, the triumphal procession was wont to stop for a sweet and joyous singing, and for the interchange of blythe and happy mockeries and good fortunes, it now stopped also; but, instead, the tombs upon the huge car opened, and thence crawled, or glided, or sprang forth figures garbed in close-fitting black, all painted over with the insignia of death, the grinning skull, the long-jointed arms and legs, and all the bones of the human skeleton. These dreadful things moved close one to another; and then, to the drear accompaniments of muffled strains, sang, in a most

melancholy music, that solemn chant beginning —

"*Dolor, pianto e penitenza,*" etc.

It was a strange sight. Many, it is said, dream of it still.

. . . . . .

After a still evening, and a sunsetting sky of the most marvellous delicate green, with pale lemon-yellow spaces beyond, the weather has changed. I noted how low the fireflies flittered among the under-branches of the guelder-rose and around the bole of my old yew, and how sultry their wandering lights. The voices of the dogs barking in the gardens of Fiesole came down the slopes no more clear and sharp, but as though from afar, and muffled, as in a dense snowing. Nothing crackled in the garden. That strange beast out of Araby or Cathay, which Messer Antonio gave me in exchange for my portrait of him, made a mewing noise, very weird, yet not like any cat or other animal I have known — rather like a mad person mouthing in vague fear. Methought it might be a lost soul. If — if I ——

The rain at last! Streaming, rushing, pouring down; the garden-ways aflood; the house-vents spouting forth upon the streets! Most

joyous of sounds! Oh, would I were striding along, singing my Song of Death, amid the now wind-furied glades, in tempestuous Vallombrosa!

. . . . . .

II *

Yesterday I completed a series of drawings of strange animals, similar to those of dragons, and other rare creatures, which I made for Giuliano de' Medici. I have often wondered if, in some far country, a fortunate traveller will not unexpectedly come upon those half-human creatures of which legends tell us. How well I remember going to a wild rocky place on the Pisan shore, in hope to see the golden hair and white breasts and waving arms of those Ladies of the Deep of whom I heard oft in my boyhood: or, at the very least, to catch the delicate sweet forlornness of their alien singing! One night — it seems but yester eve as I recall it — I lay in a heathy dingle, watching the moonlight resting like the

* The following excerpts, all that remain of Piero's Journal, are plainly of a considerably later date than those just given. The postscript by Antonio del Monte is written on the page immediately succeeding that containing Piero's latest entry. There is some further writing below the "Requiescat," apparently in Latin, but, save for a few letters, indecipherable.

caressing hand of God upon the tired earth: and listening to the deep undertone of the ancient Sea, as he laid his lips against the shore and murmured, in a tongue unknown to men, secrets of Oblivion, and dull, remote prophecies. There was an absolute hush in the air. Now and again the pinging sound of a gnat deepened the profound stillness. Almost I fancied that I heard the serene aërial chiming of the stars. While I lay there adream, mine ears caught the sound of a faint splashing. I thought it was a fish, leaping in silver upon a moongold wave to snap at a wandering firefly. Then as the sound waxed more distinct and without intermission, I conceived the idea that the sirens were swimming landward, and I caught myself listening eagerly for that wild fantastic music which lures mariners to the doom of which no man knoweth the manner or fulness. Suddenly I heard a low laugh. The sweet humanity of it acted upon me like the dawn after a night of gloom. As silently as the doe lifts her head from the fern-covert when she scents from afar off the prowling wolf, I raised myself. *Per Bacco!* was I still adream? . . . I wondered. A beautiful girl ran to and fro along the sea-marge, her ivory limbs splashing far and wide the foam of each long, low, wave.

Her hair drifted behind her like the tresses of a wind-blown larch. Her beautiful naked body gleamed in the moonlight, and as she moved hither and thither, now swiftly as though pursued, now with dainty listlessness, I thought that I had never seen aught lovelier. A little cape ran out from the shore, and as she neared it she laughed low again and again: low, and yet so that I heard it easily. It thrilled me unspeakably. There was in it such unfathomable pain, and yet with — oh, such a subtle rare magic of delight! I felt that I could — nay, that I would — follow that low-haunting laugh, and that ideal beauty, even to the ends of the earth, even though I were led into places of death, unspeakable because of their terror. Suddenly she — this thing of beauty and grace — disappeared as in a wave, and I saw her no more. With the speed of a man fleeing for his life I raced towards the beach. Strange that I should notice, and for a second or two halt, because of the shrill sudden cry of an aziola. It mocked me, I thought. But when I reached the shore, nought was there. There was the same vast stretch of the moonlit deep: the same long low wave, for ever breaking in foam out of stillness, like the froth upon a dying man's lips: the same inscrutable silence on sea and land, save for the

pinging of the gnats below the cystus-bushes, and the low thrilling monotone out of the heart of the waters. Hastily I ran out upon the little cape: but no, nought could I see beyond it nor close under. Had I, then, beheld one of those mysterious creatures who live in Ocean, and lament a lost humanity? I wandered all night long by the margin of the sea, but heard no unwonted sound, save the crying of a strange bird far waveward: saw no unusual sight, save a furtive phosphorescence which came and went upon the dark surface of the waters, like an evil smile upon the face of an Oriental satrap dreaming of cruel delights. But about dawn I met a haggard fisherman, who stared at me blankly and muttered some foolishness. From him, in reply to my eager questions, I learned that one Mariana, the daughter of a gentleman of Pisa, had recently become distraught because of the exceeding beauty of a youth of whom she had dreamt — because of his surpassing loveliness, but still more because of his visionary immortality, which could not mate with her earthliness. She had passed through Pisa as one dazed, and had been seen at sundown watching the inward-moving tide, and laughing strangely to herself the while. None had seen or heard of her since. But this had occurred many

days — ay, weeks — before mine own adventure. To this day, in all verity, I know not whether 'twas Mariana of Pisa whom I saw passing like a dream through the wave, or some Donna Ignota born of the moonshine and the sea.

. . . . . .

To-night, as I walked in my wilderness (so I lovingly call my garden), filled full as it is with all manner of strange things and desolate growths, I noticed an unwonted flashing of red lights. Ever and again it happened, and once so that I was almost dazzled. At first I thought some rare creature, a lizard or salamander from afar, or it might be some gem or old-time weapon, lay amid the mould; but at the last I found to my surprise that this flashing of light was caused by two or three blooms among a cluster of nasturtiums. One, in particular, glowed like the lantern of a monk in a dark wine-vault. I knew not till then that flowers gave off this mysterious effulgence, though, now I think of it, Suleiman has told me that he has seen something of the kind in the region beyond Nilus. It has made me think. Perhaps all created things give off some coloured emanation. I should like to paint the people going to and fro in the streets of Florence, with all their hidden

sins and made visible in furtive flashes of scarlet and purple, and wan green and yellow, and bloodied red! *Cristo,* how the Medici would reward me for my pains if I painted *them!* 'Twould be a short shrift then for the hermit-painter, Piero di Cosimo! Nay, but seriously, what if some of us have this quality? 'Twould account for the divers strange and terrifying apparitions of the dead, of which rumour is oft, in the dark hours, so garrulous.

(On the morrow.)

I slept little last night, for a deep brooding over the thing of which I have writ above. I have decided to tell Alessandro Bardi that I shall paint him and his Caterina after all. How I hate old Luigi Bardi! The insolence of the purse-proud man! How dared he insult me that day on the Ponte Vecchio?—sneering at me as a madman because I had stood staring for an hour or more upon the marvellous violet lights in the shallow flood of Arno, laughing loudly while I told him that that violet had to be waited for for weeks at a time; mocking with his twisted mouth, "Violet! violet! *Corpo di Cristo,* hark to the man! He cannot even see aright!" Fool that he was! Howsoever, it is true that painters see deeper into colour, as falconers see further than goldsmiths. And yet, because of

his ducats, he thought he could obtain a portrait of his son and his mistress from me! No doubt — *si, si amico mio* — you shall have the portrait — *ecco!* Piero di Cosimo shall paint your son and the twilight-eyed Caterina.

. . . . . .

'Tis a month since I have writ aught in these pages. Alessandro and Caterina are both dead: died o' the plague, it is said. I know better.

They came to me. I made that a condition. I painted both upon one canvas. A comely youth, Alessandro: Caterina's beauty, melancholy, exquisite, like an autumnal eve on the maremma. How they loved each other! Oftentimes I laid down my brush, and once I burst into laughter so loud and so long that Bardi, the good youth, hesitatingly came towards me, as a stag might approach a hyena. But I waved him back, with muttered execrations. Had he gained but one glimpse of my canvas he would have slain me forthwith. Oftener, I simulated great abstraction in labour, and watched them furtively. Her favourite attitude was to lean her head against his breast, and then, many a time, she sang a wondrous sweet song of the Trevisan (whereof she was a native), so that my tawdry workroom became glorified, I know not how. His pleasure

was to stroke her long lustrous hair, and to look dreamily into those shadowy eyes of hers, where immortality seemed to brood amid depths of death. She was with child, and oft looked suddenly at naught, in a wild trouble, as I have seen a white hart do at the falling echo of a far-off baying hound. Ah! this terrible brutality of motherhood. It is a device of nature to humiliate the soul, of which she is jealous unto death. She has disguised it in a rainbow, as a Borgia might convey a debilitating, slow-killing poison in an exquisite rose. . . . Well, I watched them oft. The other eventide I was sitting alone, brooding upon the frightful thing before me, all but finished it was, when Suleiman entered. I did not hear him knock, nor do I believe he did, though he so averred. He is a dark and evil spirit. He stared at my canvas, and an awful look lurked about his eyes and mouth. Then he laughed. Thereafter he told me that he, too, bore a bitter grudge against Luigi Bardi. *Dio mio,* how it thrilled me when the swart Oriental — Suleiman el Moro, he calls himself, though hell knows his accursed name — confessed that he had woven a spell upon my brushes, so that demons had entered into them. "To what end?" I asked, with my tongue moving like a wounded thing in time o'

drought. "So that when Luigi Bardi's son and his love look upon your painting they shall become what you have depicted them." In horror I rose, thrust the grim saturnine Suleiman aside, and ran from the house, as one pursued by a demon. For I had painted Alessandro as the Lust of a Devil, and Caterina as the Desire of a Beast. 'Twas a wild revenge upon Bardi: but now God had turned it against me. I stayed all the night with Antonio del Monte, moaning so, at times, that he cried to me at last a wolf were fitter company. On the morrow, filled with remorse, and resolved to end my folly, I hastened back to my house. As I passed under the shadow of the Duomo I met Pietro Avante, who asked me if I had heard that Sandro Bardi and Caterina Dà Ru had gone secretly from Florence — so it was said, at the least, for nowhere were they to be found. My heart sank deep, deep, though I put a brave front against disastrous fate. At the end of the Borgo di San Sepolcro my late pupil, Giraldo da Signa, stopped me, and asked me if I knew whither Suleiman el Moro was bound. "Wherefore?" I asked. "Because, as I was going home, an hour before dawn — having been at the carousal of Berto Danoli, who is returning to Venice as the heir of his old uncle Bene-

detto — curse him for a miser! — I descried El Moro riding upon a white horse, and methought he had the face of a corpse as he stared, in his swift passing, towards the way of the Pisan Gate." "I know not, fool," I muttered; "think you the accursed Egyptian, or whatever he be, is my son?" But thereafter I hurried with trembling limbs to my house. When I entered the workroom I thought my heart-strings would break: 'twas as though my heart were a wet cloth wrung by a woman on Arno-side. There lay Alessandro Bardi and Caterina, not only dead, but horrible in death: with a likeness, appalling, frightful, to their ghastly phantasma on the canvas. I know not how they died: whether she shrieked and fell (they must have come earlier than their wont, and seized the opportunity to look at my canvas), or whether he turned and slew her and then strangled himself, or whether demons wrought their death, I know not. They looked as though they had died of the Black Pest. Hastily I dashed paint this way and that across my accursed picture, and scraped the distorted features with the palette knife, till it was as ghastly a ruin as the love of Sandro and Caterina. Then again I rushed out, crying, "*The Pest! the Pest!*" At first I was taken for mad. I know not how it might have

gone with me; but the authorities, fearing to have even the name of the plague mentioned, sent for, and privily removed, the two dead bodies, and had them burned on a waste spot half a league behind the wester slope of Fiesole. And now it is all over — all gone — all done. It might be a horror of the night, but for this letter from Luigi Bardi, with its awful curse; but for this oily, dull-savoured, blood-red pebble, come to me this morning, whence I know not, without word of any kind, without indication, save the word " Suleiman " cried hollowly behind me by — by — *something.*

. . . . . .

Old age is terrible when manhood is prostituted in it. It ought to be as full of peace and beauty as a snow-covered landscape in sunlight, as happy as a child's laughter among unfolding blossoms. To be a derelict upon the ocean of life is worse than any sudden wreckage. Death itself can never be truly abject: living death is the grave: corruption.

. . . . . .

Sorely distraught have I been of late. No sound could I withstand. The very sight of priests, monks, councillors, any one almost, of flies and shadows even, has made me quiver like an aspen. Oftentimes I have thrown

down my brushes, cursing, because of my impotent hands. They would give me medicine. There is but one potion for me. They would poison me, no doubt. But I am already dead. O God, the beauty of the world!

. . . . . .

'Tis all one ravening horror. And I have worshipped Nature! Fool — fool — fool that I was! It is a Monster with a passion for Death. It is a Creature, devouring, insatiable. We are but the froth blown for a moment above its churning jaws.

. . . . . .

Is there anything more beautiful than a windless midsummer eve, within the hour of moonrise? Nothing stirs, save the flittering bats. The slow-circling fireflies swing their flames among the cypress boughs. Nature is dead, or asleep. God leans downward wistfully, and looks betwixt the stars of His azure veil upon the world the foolish priests say is His. Somewhere in the unsunned gyres of infinity, the unknown God, the third and conquering Protagonist, looks upward, with dim prevision, beyond the twin Portals of his Rest — Oblivion and Chaos.

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(Appended in the Script of Messer Antonio

del Monte, Chemist and Naturalist, of Florence.)

Yester-morn, not having seen the maestro for many days, and knowing how his madness has been growing upon him, I went through his desolate garden, strewn with the bones of the many rare beasts and what not he hath purchased from me, and ruinous with decay and damp vicious glooms, and then up the broken marble stairs to his door. There was a weight against it. I pushed it to, and lo, the corpse of Piero, with a most awful horror on its face, lying head towards me, with the feet still upon the stairway. I note this here at once, lest any questioning should arise. Here, also, I record his own wish, told me but a half-month ago, that he was to be buried in his garden, betwixt a great heavy iron crucifix that would cover him, and an equally huge and heavy iron cross. Upon the former was to be engraved the single word, SPES, upon the latter, NATURA.

(Requiescat in Pace: Antonio Barili del Monte.)

The Birth, Death and Resurrection of a Tear

THE BIRTH, DEATH AND RESURRECTION OF A TEAR

It is not only the haschisch eater who can, in a moment, pass from the exigent life of the commonplace to the dear tyranny of dreams. How trivial, how laboriously methodical, is that vulgar approach to pleasure — the pipe of the opium-smoker, or the drugged coffee of the slave of Indian hemp.

There is another avenue to the gate of dreams. Those who have the secret may enter at any moment from the maze of life and move swiftly to the goal: more swift than the desert mare, the fleetfoot wind.

Thus it was, that to-day, when amid ordinary surroundings, and alone with a dear friend to whom I had come to say farewell — a word unsaid after all, and this because of a dream — I was suaded from myself by one of those unexpected visionary reveries which relieve even the weariest days of the dreamer.

It was not willingly I had gone to see my friend. My love for her had grown too bitter, and at last I had come to believe that she was of a hard and cynical spirit. But for my own sake, as well as for what lay beyond, I determined to make an end of what was be-

come intolerable. Nor was I allured from my purpose by her beauty, her grace, her exquisitely restrained cordiality. The bitterness of renunciation, the greater bitterness of a conviction that she felt only with the brain and the nerves, and not with the heart, restrained me.

We had talked of many things of no real moment, and yet I was no nearer what I had to say. I remembered the words of a friend who also had loved her, and loved vainly: "She is beautiful as the sea, and as cold, as emotionless, as deadly cruel."

I know not by what accident it was that, as she stooped over the silver tea-tray, which caught the vagrant glow of the fire — all of light and sound there was in that quietude of dusk — a sparkle as of a diamond came from behind the long dark eyelashes which so greatly enhanced her beauty. It was an unshed tear; for I saw it glimmer like a dewdrop amid twilight shadows, then suspend tremulously. Yet it did not fall at last down that lovely sunbrown cheek no bloom of any "sun'd September apricock" could outvie: as dew it came and was absorbed again.

Whether the dear surprise, or the mere white glimmer of that errant herald from the heart, fascinated me, I know not; but suddenly my mind was in that motionless suspension

which the windhover has when she lifts her breast against a sudden tide of air.

I saw before me, and far behind, a lustrous expanse of waters. The sun-dazzle was upon those nearest to me, and the wind, frothing the little gold and silver cups tossed continuously by the blue wavelets, made a sunny laughter for leagues amid the yellow-meaded prairies of azure. Beyond, the saffron shimmer lay upon hyacinthine hollows deepening to limitless spaces of purple. Then the sky-line and the sea-line met, and blue within blue was lost.

I had scarce apprehended the vast extent, the near witching beauty, when I realised that I was submerged in fathomless depths. I had not fallen, and had no sense of falling: rather, without sound or motion, the depths had invisibly expanded, and now enfolded me.

So wrought by wonder was I, that when I saw a green lawn stretching before me I did not know whether to advance or to look upon it as one of the fluid lawns of the sea. Then I reflected that in the depths of the sea-water would not be of a sunlit green. The next moment I was walking swiftly across it, and I remember how soft and springy was the turf beneath my feet.

All sense of the marvellous had now left me. When, overhead, I heard the rapturous song

of lark after lark, I was no more astonished. Why should I be, when my eyes were filled with the beauty of the wild-roses which fell in veils over the wilding hedges and almost hid the honeysuckle and fragrant briar: when every sense was charmed by the loveliness of each garth and copse I passed on my way into a woodland, in whose recesses I could hear the cooing of doves and the windy chimes of cascades and singing brooks?

Never had I seen any forest so beautiful. As I advanced, the trees had an aspect of ancient grandeur, or of a loveliness which went to my heart. Avenue after avenue, vista after vista, disclosed innumerable perspectives of green foliage and the hues of a myriad flowers, with golden sunlight breaking everywhere, and overhead and between the high boughs a sky of a deep joy-giving blue. White birds, and others rainbow-hued, drifted through the sun-warm spaces or flashed from branch to branch. The fern quivered every here and there with the leaping of the fawns, the bleating of the does audible the while by some unseen watercourse. Some of the flowers were familiar: wild hyacinth and windflowers, orchis and the purple anemone, kingcups and daffodils, and many others, all children of the Spring, but otherwise without heed of their

wonted season, so that the primrose and the wild-rose were neighbours, and snowdrops and aconites clustered under the red hawthorn.

But there were also others which were strange. Many of these seemed to me as though rubies and emeralds and rainbow-hued opals had risen from their rocky beds in the depths of the earth, and stolen to the surface, and bared their breasts to the kisses of the sunflame which gave them life and joy even while it consumed them with its passionate ardour.

The birds, too, were wonderful to behold. There were among them what seemed blooms of pink or azure fire with wings of waving light: and the song of these was so wilderingly sweet that Ecstacy and Silence, walking hand in hand through that Eden of Dream, knew not when they became one, the Joy that cannot be seen nor uttered nor divined.

Through all this loveliness I went as one wrought by the gladness of death. Some such rapture as this must oftentimes allure the liberated soul when, the veil rent, the air of a new and stronger delight is inhaled at every breath.

Then, all at once, I knew I was not alone in that lovely Avalon. Voices of surpassing sweetness prevailed through the green

branches. I thought at first that the whispering leaves were the sighs and laughter of the happy dead. One haunting sweet voice I followed, a delicate, remote, exquisite ululation, faint as dream-music across the dark sea of sleep. Like one winged I went, for the trees slid motionlessly by, as, to the wind, they must seem to recede from his lifting pinions.

In the very inmost Eden of that paradise I stood at last, silent, intent. Beside a fount, whose crystalline wave was filled with sun-gold and frothed with sun-dazzle, bent a spirit of a loveliness of which I cannot speak. She was as though she were a beam of light from the places, east of the sun and west of the moon, where the young seraphim for joy reweave the perishing rainbows.

About her were beautiful tremulous phantoms, coming and going, appearing and vanishing. These were joys and hopes, aspirations and unspoken prayers, dear desires and longings and wistful yearnings, fair thoughts and delicate dreams.

From her I looked into that halcyon water. The sparkle, the shine of it, entranced me.

At last I spoke. She turned, glanced at me with a shy, sweet serenity, and, after a brief incertitude, beckoned to me to approach.

I knew that I had never looked upon any one so lovely; yet, her face was vaguely familiar. Doubtless it was Ideala, long sought, long dreamed of.

"Look," she whispered, as soon as she had slipped her hand into mine. Together we bent over the sunlit fount. It was like an opal in its lovely hues. In the very core of it I saw what seemed the most exquisite pearl. This appeared to me to be forming, for every moment it grew lovelier. Suddenly it rose, came to the surface, and, for a few seconds, was filled with sunlight, before it welled into one of the many golden conduits which, I now noticed, led from the fountain.

A few seconds: yet in that single pulse of time I learned a wonderful thing. "Do you see this fount?" said Ideala again, in the same low thrilling whisper: "it is the heart of my heart."

"Of your heart, O beautiful Dream?"

"Yes. Do you not know that you are now in my heart? All this fair Eden you have traversed, since you came from the deep wave that brought you hither, is my heart. You saw the flowers, you heard the songs of the birds, the voice of cool waters, the murmur of strange winds: Did none interpret to you?"

"And all these lovely phantoms, these

beautiful Hopes and Aspirations and tender Sympathies and brave Heroisms?"

"They are my helpers and servers; but I do not see them."

"And this fount, this sunlit water?"

"It is the Fount of Tears that is in every woman's heart. Now it is warmed with flooding sunshine, because I love. Thus it is that the tears that rise are single just now: and are so beautiful, wrought as they are of rainbow-hope."

"And who are you?" I cried, a sudden, wild, passionate hope coming upon me like a tempest, making me as a leaf before the wind.

She looked at me amazedly.

Her lips moved, but I caught no sound. A swift mist was rising between us. She had withdrawn her hand, and though eagerly I stretched my arms I could not reach her.

A name, the dearest of all names, burst from my lips. I saw a wonderful light in the beautiful face. The eyes, the eyes told me all. Lamps of home, sweet lamps of home!

There was a rush of waters. The tear I had seen welling from her heart was the same as that which died on her eyes, and had in its death borne me to the lovely sanctuaries of her heart. Again, it expanded into a great wave; again a limitless ocean stretched beyond me;

again I was enveloped and borne swiftly from depth below to depth above, till the senses for one flashing second reeled as the soul returned from its moment's flight.

Did I say an unshed tear gleamed upon me from behind the dark eyelashes of her whom I loved, and so little understood, so scarcely knew?

Truly, I saw it glimmer like a dewdrop amid twilight shadows: then suspend tremulously: but now — how long ago, or but the breath of a moment? — that which had been born in longing and had died in pain, knew, now, a lovely resurrection.

My heart was full of a great joy, a great reverence. I rose, trembled, and at that moment the tear fell down the lovely sunbrown cheek no bloom of any " sun'd September apricock " could outvie.

The Hill-Wind

THE HILL-WIND

When the Hill-Wind awoke by the tarn the noontide heats were over. The blithe mountain-air, fragrant with thyme and honey-ooze, with odours of pine and fir, flowed softly across the uplands. The sky was of a deep, lustrous, wind-washed azure, turquoise-tint where it caught the sun-flood southerly and westerly. A few snowy wisps of vapour appeared here and there, curled like fantastic sleighs or sweeping aloft as the tails of wild horses; then quickly became attenuated, or even all at once and mysteriously disappeared. Far and near the grouse called, or rose from the cranberry-patches in the ling in their abrupt flurries of flight, beating the hot air with their pinions till it was vibrant with the echoing whirr. The curlews wheeled about the water-courses, crying plaintively. Faint but haunting sweet as remote chimes, the belling of the deer was audible in the mountain-hollows.

A myriad life thrilled the vast purple upland. The air palpitated with the innumerable suspirations of plant and flower, insect and bird and beast. Curious in the tarn the speckled trout caught the glint of the wander-

ing sunray; far upon the heights the fleeces of the small hill-sheep seemed like patches of snow in the sunlight; remote on the scaur beyond the highest pines, the eagle, as he stared unwaveringly upon the wilderness beneath him, shone resplendent as though compact of polished bronze set with gems.

Every sound, every sight, was part of the intimate life of the Hill-Wind. All was beautiful: real. The remote attenuated scream of the eagle: the high thin cry of the kestrel when doubling upon herself in hawking the moorland; the floating lilt of the yellow-hammer: the air-eddies sliding through the honey-laden spires of heather, or whispering among the canna and gale: the myriad murmur from the leagues of sunswept ling and from the dim grassy savannahs which underlay that purple roof: each and all were to her as innate voices.

For a long time she lay in a happy suspension of all thought or activity, fascinated by the reflection of herself in the tarn. Lovely was the image. The soft, delicately-rounded white limbs, the flower-like body, seemed doubly white against the wine-dark purple of the bell-heather and the paler amethyst of the ling. The large shadowy eyes, like purple-blue pansies, dreamed upward from the face in the

water. Beautiful as was the sun-dazzle in the hair that was about her head as a glory of morning, even more beautiful was the shimmer of gold and fleeting amber shot through the rippled surface and clear-brown undercalm of the tarn; where also was mirrored, with a subtler beauty than above, the tremulous sulphur-butterfly, poising its yellow wings as it clung to her left breast, ivory-white, small, and firm.

Dim inarticulate thoughts passed through the mind of the Oread — for an Oread the Hill-Wind had been, long, long ago, beyond many lovely transformations — as she lay dreaming by the mountain-pool. Down what remote avenues of life fared her pilgrim eyes, seeking ancestral goals; from what immemorial past arose, like flying shadows at dawn, recollections of the fires of sunrise kindling along the mountain-summits, of the flames of sunset burning slowly upward from the beech-forests to the extreme pines, sombre torches erelong against the remotest snows; vague remembrances of bygone pageants of day and night, of the voicing of old-world winds and the surpassing wonder of the interchange and outgrowth of the seasons, from the Spring Chant of the Equinox to the dirge Euroclydon. Ever and again drifted through

her mind fleeting phantoms of life still nearer to herself: white figures, seen in vanishing glimpses of unpondered, all-unconscious reverie — figures which slipt from tree to tree in the high hill-groves, or leaped before the wind, with flying banners of sunlit hair, or stooped to drink from the mountain-pools which the deer forsook not at their approach. Who, what, was this white shape, upon whose milky skin the ruddy light shone, as he stood on a high ledge at sundown and looked meditatively upon the twilit valleys and gloomsome underworld far below? Whose were these unremembered yet familiar sisters, flowerlike in their naked beauty, gathering moonflowers for garlands, while their straying feet amid the dew made a silver shimmer as of gossamer-webs by the waterfalls? Who was the lovely vision, so like that mirrored in the tarn before her, who, stooping in the evergreen-glade to drink the moonshine-dew, suddenly lifted her head, listened intently, and smiled with such wild shy joy?

What meant those vague half-glimpses, those haunting illusive reminiscences of a past that was yet unrememberable?

Troubled, though she knew it not, unconsciously perplexed, vaguely yearning with that nostalgia for her ancestral kind which had

been born afresh and deeply by the contemplation of her second self in the mountain pool, the Hill-Wind slowly rose, stretched her white arms, with her hands spraying out her golden hair, and gazed longingly into the blue haze beyond.

Suddenly she started, at the irruption of an unfamiliar sound that was as it were caught up by the wind and flung from corrie to corrie. It was not like the fall of a boulder, and it sounded strangely near. Stooping, she plucked a sprig of gale: then, idly twisting it to and fro, walked slowly to where a mountain-ash, ablaze with scarlet berries, leaned forward from a high heathery bank overlooking a wide hollow in the moors. A great dragon-fly spun past her like an elf's javelin. The small yellow-brown bees circled round and brushed against her hair, excited by this new and strange flower that moved about like the hill-sheep or the red deer. As she stood under the shadow of the rowan and leaned against its gnarled trunk, two small blue butterflies wavered up from the heather and danced fantastically over the sun-sprent gold above her brow. She laughed, but frowned as a swift swept past and snapt up one of the azure dancers. With a quick gesture she broke off a branch of the rowan, but by this

time the other little blue butterfly had wavered off into the sunlight.

Holding the branch downward she smiled as she saw the whiteness of her limbs beneath the tremulous arrowy leaves and the thick clusters of scarlet and vermilion berries. Whenever the gnats, whirling in aërial maze, came too near, she raised the rowan branch and slowly waved them back. Suddenly . . . her arm stiffened, and she stood motionless, rigid, intent. It was the Voice of the Sea, the dull, obscure, summoning voice that whispered to the ancient Gods, and called and calls to all Powers and Dominions that have been and are; the same that is in the ears of Man as an echo; and in the House of the Soul as a rumour of a coming hour.

Motionless herself, her eyes travelled through the long haze-blue vistas of the hills. The scythe-swift Shadow of a mighty pinion moved from slope to slope. The Hill-Wind sighed. Then, smiling under some new impulse of joy, she leaped forward, but only indolently to throw herself upon a flood of sunlight streaming by.

The wide reach of harebell-waters, beyond where the heather broke down to the sea, shimmered suddenly into a dazzle of gold flame. A few waves swung aloft their coro-

nals of foam, laughing joyously to the chant of their sweet sea-tune. They had gained a sister: the Sea-wind, a bride: and Ocean a breath, a suspiration, an ended sigh.

Love in A Mist

LOVE IN A MIST

In a green hollow in the woodlands, Love, a mere child, with sunny golden curls and large blue eyes, stood whimpering. A round tear had fallen on his breast and trickled slowly down his white skin, till it lay like a dewdrop on his thigh: another was in pursuit, but had reached no further than a dimple in the chubby cheek, into which it had heedlessly rolled and could not get out again. Beside Love was a thicket of white wild roses, so innumerable that they seemed like a cloud of butterflies alit on a hedge for a moment and about to take wing — so white that the little wanderer looked as though he were made of rose-stained ivory. Here was the cause of the boy's whimpering. A thorn-point had slightly scratched his right arm, barely tearing the skin but puncturing it sufficiently to let a tiny drop of blood, like a baby rowan-berry, slowly well forth.

Love looked long and earnestly at the wound. Then he whimpered, but stopped to smile at a squirrel who pretended to be examining the state of its tail, but was really watching him. When the little drop of blood would

neither roll away nor go back, Love grew angry, and began to cry.

"Ah, I am so weak," he sighed; "perhaps I shall die! Ah, wretched little soul that I am, to lie here in this horrible thorny wood. No — no — I will drag myself out into the sunshine, and die there. Perhaps — p'raps — *(sniffle)* —'aps — *(sniffle)* — a kind lark will" —*(sniffle)*.

Sobbing bitterly, Love crept through a beech-hedge, and so into the open sunlit meadow beyond. He was so unhappy that he quite forgot to knock off from a grey thistle a huge snail, although its shell shone temptingly many-hued; and even a cricket that jumped on to his foot and then off again hardly brought to his face a wan smile.

But after sitting awhile by a heavy burdock, and sobbing at gradually lengthening intervals, he stopped abruptly. Out of a garth of red clover and white campions he saw two round black eyes staring at him with such unmitigated astonishment that he could do nothing else but stare back with equal rigidity and silence.

"Why, it is only a brown hare," exclaimed Love below his breath. "How it smiles!" — and therewith he broke into so hearty a laugh that the hare sprang round as if on a pivot,

and went leaping away through the meadow. Beyond the puffed campions were a cluster of tall ox-eye daisies, and they moved so temptingly towards him in the breeze that Love ran as it were to meet them.

No sooner, however, was he in their midst than he pluckt them one by one, and then ran back with them towards the wood, in whose cool shadow, he thought, it would be delightful to weave of them a starry wreath.

But by the time the wreath was woven, Love was both thirsty and aweary of being still. So, having sipped the dew from a bed of green mosses among the surface-roots of a vast oak, he ran into a little wilderness of wild hyacinths, and danced therein with maddest glee, while the sunlight splashed upon him through the dappling shadows of the oak boughs.

A fat bumble-bee and two white butterflies joined him for a time, but at last the bee grew hot and breathless, and the butterflies were frightened by his joyous laughter and the clapping of his little hands. Scarce, however, was he left alone once more than he descried a young fawn among the fern. It took him but a moment to snatch his wreath of ox-eye daisies and but another to spring to the side of the startled fawn and place the wreath

round its neck. The great brown eyes looked fearfully at Love, who, little rascal, pretended to be caressing when he was really making ready for a leap. In a second he was on the fawn's back — but, ah! poor Love, he had not calculated for such a flight. Away sped the fawn, athwart the glade, through the hollow, and out across the meadow towards the sand-dune. Gradually Love's hold became more and more insecure, and at last off he came right into a mass of yellow irises and a tadpole-haunted little pool.

Love might have stopped to cry, or at least to chase the tadpoles, but he happened to see a sea-gull flying low beyond him across the dunes. With a shout he pursued it, forgetful alike of the fawn and his lost wreath.

But when he came to the break in the dunes he could not see the ocean because of the haze that lay upon it, and in which the sea-gull was soon lost to sight. But at least the sands were there. For a time he wandered disconsolately along the shore. Then, when he saw the tide slowly advancing, he frowned. "Ha! ha!" he laughed, "I shall build a castle of sand, and then the sea will not know what to do, and the white gull will come back again."

But having built his sand-castle, Love was

so weary that he curled himself up behind the shallow barrier, and, having wearily but lovingly placed beside him three pink half-shells, a pearly willie-winkie, a piece of wave-worn chalk, and a hermit-crab (which soon crawled away), he was speedily asleep.

Before long the ripple of the water against the very frontier of his small domain aroused the brine-bred things that live by the sea-marge. A few cockles gaped thirstily, and one or two whistle-fish sent their jets of water up into the air and then protruded their shelly snouts as if to scan the tardy advance of the tide. The sand-lice bestirred themselves, creeping, leaping, confusedly eager not to be overtaken by that rapid ooze which would quicksand them in a moment.

Then a piece of dulse was washed right on to the castle-wall. On the salt-smelling wrack was a crab, and this startled voyager saw dry land and mayhap new food to sample in the white foot of Love that lay temptingly near. Just then a flying shrimp, a mad aeronaut, a reckless enthusiast among its kind, took the fortress at a leap and alighted on Love's white and crinkled belly. The boy's body instinctively shivered. Still, he might not have awaked, had not the crab at that moment joyously gripped, as succulent prey, his little

toe, curled as it was like a small and dainty mollusc.

Love sat up, and with indignant eyes remonstrated with the crab, who had at once given way and retreated with haphazard assiduity to the shelter of a convenient pebble partially embedded in the sand.

As for the shrimp, it had come and gone like the very ghost of a tickle, like the dream-fly of sleepland.

But suddenly Love heard a voice, a low whisper, coming he knew not whence, and yet so strangely familiar. Was it borne upon the white lips of the tide, or did it come from the curving billow that swept shoreward, or from the deep beyond? Who can guess what the voice said, since Love himself knew not the sweet strange word, but was comforted: knowing only that he was to return to the wood again. Fragments he caught, though little comprehensible: "My child, my little wandering Love, who art born daily, and art ever young," and then the words of which he knew nothing, or but vaguely apprehended.

Yet ever petulant, Love would rather have stayed by the sea, even to the undoing of his castle-walls, already toppling with the upward reaching damp of the stealthy underooze, had he not descried a white wild-goat standing on

the dune and looking at him with mild eyes like sunlit sardonyx. With a glad cry he ran towards the goat, who made no play of caprice but seemed to invite, for all the strangeness of the essay, this young rider with the child's smile and the emperor's eyes.

The yellow-hammers and ousels, the whinchats and sea-larks sent abroad long thrilling notes in their excitement, as the white goat, with Love laughingly astride, raced across the dunes and over the meadows towards the wood. But as the too-impulsive steed took a fallen oak at a bound, its feet caught in the loose bark, and poor Love was shot forward into a hollow of green moss. Alas, in the comet-like passage thither, a nettle slightly stung the sole of one foot; so that the moment he had recovered from his somersault he snatched a broken oak-branch, and turned to chastise the too heedless goat. But, to his astonishment, no goat was to be seen. It had disappeared as though it were a blossom blown by the wind.

Rubbing his eyes, Love looked again and again. No goat; no sound, even, save the ruffling of the low wind among the lofty domes of the forest, the tap-tapping of a woodpecker, the shrill cry of a jay and indiscriminate warbling undertone of a myriad

birds, with, below all, the chirp of the grasshopper and the drone of the small wood-wasp and the foraging bee.

Beyond the last copse the sun was slowly moving in a whirl of golden fire.

Hark! what was that? Love started, and then slipped cautiously from tree to tree, finding his way into the woodland like a gliding sunray. He heard voices, and a snatch of a song:—

"The wild bird called to me 'Follow!'
The nightingale whispered 'Stay!'
When lost in the hawthorn-hollow
We" . . . . . .

The next moment he descried a lovely girl lying on the moss below an oak, with her face towards the setting sun, whose warm flood soaked through the wide green flame of the irradiated leaves. A little way beyond her was a young man, no other than the singer, standing by an easel, and putting the last touches to the canvas upon which he was at work.

Love was curious. He had never seen a picture, and, in fact, he thought the man was probably spreading out something to eat. He, child though he was, was so fearless, that no one could have daunted him, and so na-

tively royal, that no idea even of his being gainsaid troubled his brain.

With great interest he stole alongside the painter. He looked at the canvas dubiously; sniffed it; and then turned away with a gesture of disapproval. He liked the look of the pigments on a palette that lay on the ground, and thought that the man was perhaps no other than he who painted the king-cups and violets and the bells of the hyacinths. But the smell made him sick, and so he stole towards the girl to see what *she* was doing.

It vaguely puzzled him that neither the man nor the girl seemed to be aware of his presence; yet, as Love never troubled to think, the bewilderment was but a shadow of a passing cloud. The girl was beautiful. He loved better to look at her than at any other flower of the forest. Even the blue corn-flower, even the hedge-speedwell, had not so exquisite a blue as the dream-wrought eyes into whose unconscious depths he looked long, and saw at last his own image, clear as in deep water. "I wish she would sing," said Love to himself; "that man yonder is no better than a huge bumble-bee." With a mischievous glance he pluckt a tall wind-flower, and gently tickled her with it.

A faint smile, a delicate wave of colour, came into her face. *"Ah, Love! Love!"* she whispered below her breath.

How sweet the words were! With a happy sigh Love cuddled up close to the beautiful girl, and, tired and drowsy, would soon have fallen asleep, had not the heaving of her bosom disturbed him.

"Ah, what a tiresome world it is," exclaimed Love fretfully, as he crawled indolently away, and then rested again among some blue flowers. There he sat for some time, sulkily tying a periwinkle round each toe. Suddenly, with a cry of joy, he descried among the flowers his lost bow and sheaf of arrows. With a merry laugh he reached for them, and in mere wantonness began to fray the petals with an arrow, and to tangle them into an intricate net of blue blossom and green fibre.

But in the midst of his glee came retribution. He heard a rustling sound, a quick exclamation, and the next moment an easel fell right atop of him, and, but for his soft, mossy carpet, might have flattened him, for all his white plumpness. True, the easel was picked up again immediately, but Love felt the insult as well as the blow. With a yell of anger, that very nearly startled a neighbour-

ing caterpillar, he fitted an arrow to his bow, and shot it straight at the clumsy owner of the easel. "Aha," he thought, "I have paid you back, you see," for he saw the young man stop, grow pale, hesitate, and then suddenly fall on his knees. "Ah! he is wounded to death," and Love's tender heart got the better of his resentment, and he would fain have recalled that deadly arrow. But to his astonishment the youth seemed more eager to seize and kiss the girl's hand than to save his life, if that were still possible!

As for the girl, the sunset was upon her face as a flame. She tried to rise, and in doing so trampled upon one of Love's toes. Poor little Love danced about furiously on one foot, holding his wounded toe with one hand; but alas! again his hasty anger overcame him, and, before he realised what he had done, he shot another arrow, this time straight at the heart of the lovely girl.

Alas, how it weakened her at once! In the agony of death, no doubt, she fell forward into the man's arms and laid her head upon his breast.

But speedily Love saw that they were not dead or even dying, but merely kissing and fondling each other, and this too in the most insensate fashion.

"Oh, how funny! how funny!" laughed Love, and rolled about in an ecstasy among the blue flowers, making the tangle worse than ever.

. . . . . .

(*Twilight.*)

She. Darling — darling — let me go now — let me go. It will soon be dark.

He. Sweetheart, wait!

She. Hush! What is that?

(*A low tiny snore comes from amidst the blue flowers.*)

He. Oh, it is only a bettle rubbing its shards, or a mole burrowing through the grass.

She. Ah, look; we are trampling under foot such beautiful flowers. These must be *our* flowers, dear, must they not? What are they?

He. I don't know — ah, yes, to be sure — they must be the flower called "Love in a Mist."

She (*dreamily*). I wonder if we could see Love himself if we searched below all this blue tangle?

. . . She leans down, and peers through the blue veil of the flowers. Love wakes with the fragrance of her warm breath playing upon his cheek, but does not stir, for he is

remorseful at having shot an arrow at so lovely a thing. With loving caressing touch he gently lays a dew-drop into each blue flower of her eyes. . . .

She (*whispering as she rises*). How beautiful, how wonderful it all is!

He. Ah, darling, tears in those beautiful eyes! Come, let me kiss them away.

Love (*below his breath*). Greedy wretch — I gave them to *her!* Ah, she shall have many more, and you, mayhap, none!

Hand in hand, the lovers go away, and, well content, Love turns over on his side and is soon sound asleep. The moon rises, full and golden yellow. From a beech-covert a nightingale sings with intermittent snatches of joy. Above the blue flowers two white night-moths flicker in a slow fantastic wayward dance. A glowworm, hanging on a lock of Love's curly hair, shines as though it were the child of a moonbeam and a flower.

But at last the glowworm, crawling from its high place and adown the white sweetness of Love's face, tickled his small nose, and caused him to sit up, startled, and wide awake. "What — who?" muttered Love confusedly.

THE NIGHTJAR.

Quir-rr-rr-o! . . . Quir-rr-rr-o!

THE NIGHTINGALE.

Kew-u-ēē, kwee! Kwee-kwee-tchug! tchug! tchug! kwee-kwilloh!

A RESTLESS MAGPIE (*mockingly*).

Kwilloh . . . kwollow, ohee kwollow-kwan!

ECHO.

Follow . . . oh, follow them!

FURTHER ECHO.

Follow! . . . Fol . . . low!

LOVE (*rising*).

I come, I come! who calls?

DISTANT ECHO (*faintly*).

Fol . . . low.

The Sister of Compassion

THE SISTER OF COMPASSION

(To Mrs. Mona Caird)

The June sunshine moved upon me like a flood. In my sleep, or drowsy reverie, as I lay in the hollow of the tamarisk-fringed dunes which formed the frontier between the forest and the sea, I could hear the two most thrilling voices of Nature — the murmur of a slow wind meshed among green branches, and the confused whispered tumult of great waters.

The unwontedly sustained crying of a gull caused me to stir, turn, and lean on my elbows, with my face against the near waving of the birches which ran out from the woodland. A score of yards to the right, a boulder rose from a garth of fern. Its forehead was white with bleached sea-moss, its sides golden with lichen; and like a white magnolia-bloom upon it was a snowy fulmar, crouching in pain. I saw that the poor bird had been wounded, and as it attempted to rise, at the moment I stirred, I could see that it had been shot, for the left wing was helplessly adroop.

If the fulmar would let me approach, I be-

lieved I could ease its agony; but, alas, man is the apparition of Death to his weaker comrades in the common heritage of life. By his own madness of wrong and cruelty he has forfeited that elder brotherhood which should be his pride as it is natively his right.

How, indeed, as it was through the wanton act of a man that the bird had been given over to prolonged agony and sure death, could it have been otherwise; yet it was with deep disappointment that, after I had been allowed to approach within a few yards' distance, the fulmar suddenly hurled itself into the fern. There, like a wounded duck among sedge and bulrush, it floundered heavily in a wild and despairing panic.

From the sky, a living blue, came the songs of unseen larks: from the woodland, the cooing of cushats, the sweet chitter of small birds, the blithe notes of throstle and mavis: from the sea, the chime of green wavelets running up foamy channels or leaping along among the shallows, and, beyond, that deep mysterious rhythm that contains the pulse of Time. Peace brooded upon sky, and sea, and land; but, like a laugh from hell heard among the alleys of paradise, the screaming of the wounded gull turned the sweet savour of life into bitterness.

It was at this moment I became aware of a rumour in the forest. From beech and chestnut, from lime and tall elm, from sycamore and hazel, came a ripple of sweet notes, a rustle of wings. The beech-mast crackled with the scurrying of rabbits. Young foxes, wood-hares, squirrels, stirred through the bracken round the great-rooted oaks. Across the dry water-course the shrew-mice pattered.

It was not consternation, for there were no startled cries, no reckless flight. The jay screamed no warning; the single snapping bark of the fox was unheard.

Suddenly I stood as though entranced. I saw a woman, clothed in white, moving through the sun-splashed woodland. So radiant was the warm-white of her robe, that the leaf and branch-shadows, trailing on the golden light that overlay the moss, seemed pale blue.

Through the branches over her head a myriad company of birds hovered, from the wandering cuckoo to the sky ringdove, from the missel-thrush to the wren. I saw the falcon flying harmlessly among the chaffinches, and a wind-hover moving unheeded among the crowd of fluttering sparrows.

Around, and behind her, were animals of all kinds. By her side, wild fawns, stretching

their long necks towards her, blessed her with the unconscious benediction of their eyes. One small fawn was dappled red as with autumnal leaves, or as with blood. It moved by her right, and seemed to live only by the love and pity wherewith she sustained it, by healing hand or caressing touch. In her breast was a spot of dull red. I thought it was blood, but it was only a wounded robin which she had rescued from the snare of the bird-trapper. It slept against the warmth of her bosom: its tiny pulse of life lifting the small ruddy breast in rhythm with the larger rise and fall.

The woman was young, in the beautiful youth of those who are not of this world. On her face, fair with charity, sweet with loving kindness, there was the trouble of something unfulfilled. Her eyes, which mirrored the passionate tenderness of her heart, were intent upon somewhat I could not see: some goal within the sunlit greenery, beyond the dim vistas of mysty light, of verdurous gloom; or, perhaps, upon horizons I could not discern.

I should have taken her for a vision, a spirit, but that I saw how womanly sweet she was. The white soul within her was known of every dumb or dwarfed soul among those

glad bondagers of her spell, from the falcon to the timid rabbits which leaped before her way like living surf. Moreover, she could see and hear what mortal eyes and ears could; for suddenly she caught sight of the dying gull. Swift as a wave she was beside it. With deft hands she eased the broken wing: with gentle touch she stilled the fierce pulsation. The bird looked upon her as he might have scanned a sunlit sea. A new light came into his eyes: a thrill shook his now elastic body; and though death darkened his life, the spirit which had animated him was set free, and was borne seaward by the wind.

As she rose, for she had kneeled to lay the white body where the swift chemistry of air and light would work the wise corruption of the lifeless into new life, I recognised the face.

She was one whom I had loved and honoured, whom I love and honour: a woman so wrought by the tragic pain of the weak and helpless, that, like one whom she followed blindly from afar, she daily laid down her life in order that she might be as balm here, and here might save, and at all times and in all places be a messenger of that tardy redemption which man must make in spirit and deed for the incalculable wrong which he has

done to that sacred thing he most values — Life.

I know not now what that sea was, where that forest is. But I dream, O Sister of Compassion, what was the mysterious voice of the one whispered in your ears, what the confused murmur of the other echoed in your heart.

I know not, but I dream; and I think the forest is that dark wood of human life, that *silva oscura* of living death or dying life which Dante saw with deep awe: and the sea, that ocean of mystery which involves us with a regenerating air, with a life that is not our own, with horizons of promise, and dim perspectives of inalienable hope.

And you, dear friend, are you one whom I and others have known and loved; or had I but a vision of the elect of the Following Love? Where is the goal you hungered for with those intent eyes, O Sister of Compassion: what the end, and whither the way?

The Merchant of Dreams

THE MERCHANT OF DREAMS

(A Fragment)

There is a squalid little street, in the swarming region of the Seven Dials, called World's End. I came upon it by mere hazard, one wet gloomy afternoon in midwinter, while on the quest of a friend, who, after many vicissitudes, had sunk in his last dissolute days to the position of a "super" at Drury Lane Theatre. Traces of him were not wholly indiscoverable: a confused trail, lost among disreputable public-houses. It was at one of those, the Whistling Snipe, that a man, whose accent belied the evidence of his sordid appearance, followed me to the door: and, for a small sum, volunteered to put me on the track of him whom I sought.

At first I thought the bargain was a one-sided one; for, having pocketed the money, my would-be informant told me frankly that he could not be explicit. All he could do was to put me on the track, if any track were now discoverable at all.

"No, sir," he reiterated, "I don't myself know where he is. He may be dead, or dy-

ing. He's not a 'super' now. I haven't seen him in the Lane for weeks. But if any one can help you, it will be old Father Ambrose."

"Father Ambrose?" I asked interrogatively: "is he a priest?"

"Oh, I forgot. Of course you don't know. That's what I'm here for just now. No, he's not a priest. No one knows anything about him: who he is, where he comes from, what he does. He must have a little o' the needful, for I've always heard his rooms are clean and well looked after: not that I know him or them, never having crossed the doorway o' the White Poppy."

"The White Poppy?"

"That's what old Ambrose, Father Ambrose, calls the little place he has: a bit of a bookshop, with clean windows, and no books behind 'em: got some inside. I know a man who knows him, and says the old philosopher (that's what they call him in the Lane) doesn't sell more than a book in a week, and, when he does, it's as often as not given right off just because asked for."

"And will he know where James Linton is?"

"Yes, if anybody does."

"Why?"

"Because Linton used to go there often, after he 'pulled up'."

"Pulled up?"

"After he threw over the drink. He'd got consumption, an' wanted to die decent."

"Well, show me the way," I added: and with that we passed into a maze of little squalid streets, lanes, and passages.

It was in one of these that, in a few minutes, I read the legend at the corner: *World's End.* Here my companion left me, with a parting injunction to pass a score of houses, till I came to one, set back somewhat on the right, distinguished by a board swinging from an old iron bracket. On the board would be visible the words *The White Poppy.*

"You can't go wrong," he added: "every one here knows the Sign of the White Poppy."

It was with some curiosity that, a few minutes later, I stood under the Sign of the White Poppy. The signboard swung in that dismal air, poignantly significant. What other, there, in that dread locality, could have had a more subtle allure.

White Poppies! There was magic in the words. Forgetfulness, rest, quietude, oblivion, every sweet and longed-for nepenthê, lay hid therein: like the fragrance in an unfolded rose.

The first thing that arrested my attention was the absence of books, or indeed of any saleable commodity, from the blank wooden space beyond the window. This was the more surprising, as the windows were clean and well-kept, as clean, at any rate, as was possible in that haunt of fog and squalor.

Every here and there half sheets of note-paper were affixed to the window by red wafers. Advertisements, I thought. Out of curiosity to know more of "Father Ambrose" and his avocations — for obviously his vocation as a bookseller was only nominal — I scrutinised these notices.

It was to be an hour of surprises. Of the ten or twelve slips, not one was an advertisement or business notice of any kind. Each was some fair or noble thought: without preamble or appendical name or note: self-contained. All had quotation-marks: so, doubtless, were excerpts from some book of collected sayings. This I surmised, as I glanced from one to the other. They were a strange mixture. Some were from ancient writers, some from modern: one or two from contemporary poets. A few I failed to recognise. But I remember that the central one was that noble saying of Plato: "Honour the Soul; for according as a man's deeds are,

so will the nature of his soul change for better or for worse." Below this were two, one of which I could not identify: "The Beauty of the World is the divine Veil between that morning-shadow, Humanity, and the Sunrise of God." Its companion I knew as Bacon's: "The souls of the living are the Beauty of the World." Another, long familiar, was from the Ajax of Euripides —

> "All human things
> A day lays low, a day lifts up again:
> But still the Gods love those of ordered soul."

No lover of Amiel could fail to recognise a sentiment so characteristic of the author of the *Journal Intime* as "Like the rain of night, Reverie restores colour and force to thoughts which have been blanched and wearied by the heat of the day."

Of the three or four unmistakably contemporary excerpts, I identified two only: this from Matthew Arnold:—

> "But tasks in hours of insight will'd
> Can be through hours of gloom fulfill'd,"—

And this from a poet of singular distinction, though unknown of the crowd who jostle each other at the base of Parnassus-Slope:—

"Seclusion, quiet, silence, slumber, dreams:
No murmur of a breath:
The same still image in the same still dreams,
Of Love caressing Death."

What did it all mean, I wondered? Had "Father Ambrose" settled himself in Seven Dials for the purpose of cultivating among the inhabitants a love of literature? The idea was absurd: but, then, what could be his aim?

Thereupon I did the wisest thing: I entered beneath the Sign of the White Poppy.

A tall man, who would have appeared taller but for his stoop; with long, thick, wavy white hair; eyes of a dark blue, extraordinarily vivid, giving to his whole physiognomy an aspect of youthful energy; and with thin white hands, long-fingered and delicate; advanced from an inner room, the glazed door of which he closed behind him.

"Are you . . . have you any books for sale, that I can look at?" I began awkwardly.

He smiled, and I admit that I was won straightway.

"I have a few books. They are on these shelves here to your left. You will see they are of all kinds: but all, in some degree, books of dreamers."

"Books of dreamers?"

"Yes. A book, a history, a romance, an essay, a poem, is of value to me only when it creates an atmosphere of dream."

"You are, forgive me, a strange bookseller."

"I am not a bookseller. I am a book-giver. Any one may come here who will. If a book be sought genuinely for its own sake, the seeker is welcome to it."

"Then those quotations you have affixed to your window are not meant to direct attention to the literary wares within?"

"If so, I should surely take the trouble to mention the sources whence they come. These sentences that you have read are there for their own beauty and significance: and stand or fall by their inherent truth. Of what avail to the weary creatures who live in this neighbourhood the names of Plato and Euripides?"

"Then the excerpts *are* meant for the passers-by of this region?"

"Yes: for the passers-by."

"To what end?"

"Every morning I change these beautiful and helpful sayings. Sometimes they are similar to those you have just scanned: sometimes they are keen, vivid reminders of the

beauty of earth and sky, of woodland or shore, of the mountains or the sea.

"Again, and not infrequently, they are nothing but haunting rhythms: some lovely falling cadence, some exquisite strain.

"On these occasions you would see nothing in my window but a single excerpt."

"And they are read: they are noted: they are carried away in a few grateful memories?"

"It is rare indeed they are not closely scanned by at least a score of persons in a day. Generally, this would be too moderate an estimate. I daresay fifty out of a hundred passers do not glance at them at all. Another twenty, will, after an amused, or contemptuous, or puzzled, or blankly incurious scrutiny, resume their way, with or without mockery, with or without a second thought, with or without bewilderment, each in his own kind. Of the remaining thirty or twenty, some will read over and over again: some will take one quotation, and with the avidity of starvation make it theirs, and pass on with a new light on their faces or a new depth of emotion in their weary eyes: a few will even return: now and again, a man or woman will enter, and speak with me."

"What I have said to you," resumed my new acquaintance, after a pause, "would be more exact in the past tense. For now, I am glad to be able to tell you, many poor souls whose hunger and thirst are not only the hunger and thirst of the body, come this way regularly. My window-lore has become to some as a well of pure-water, as the shadow of a green tree in a parched land, as, after long voyaging, the dear fragrance of inland odours blown seaward. Many now come to me for the only advice, the only help, it is in my power to give."

Again there was a pause; but, as I did not speak, "Father Ambrose" resumed.

"Then, too, there are the few who come to me, as, perhaps, you have done: namely, to learn, if it may be, something of the secret of creating beautiful dreams, or, at least, to obtain from me a fair dream to leaven the pain, or drear commonplace, or tragic pathos of your day."

I looked at the speaker in astonishment. There could be no question that he spoke in earnest. Was he mad, I wondered: or did he in truth mean what he said. If, perchance, he *could* accomplish what he hinted, then truly the chance which led me to him was a golden one.

"I do not understand," I remarked quietly: "Who and what are you?"

"My name is Gabriel Ambrose. Few, however, know this. Here I am generally known as 'Father Ambrose.' I think the designation has been given me partly because of my grey hairs and my solitude, or rather isolation, partly because I and my doings, or avoidance of 'doings,' make me mysterious in the eyes of my fellows. For the rest, I am known as 'The Merchant of Dreams.'"

"Do you mean that you actually sell dreams?"

"I barter dreams. Show me some fair thought, some fair aspiration, some fair hope, show me the yearning in your heart, the pain of your bruised spirit, and I will give you some lovely dream wherewith to make a music behind the passing hours and a glad rapture in the inmost courts of the spirit."

"But how can you do this thing?"

"Have you come to try?"

"No. But now, gladly, would I put you to the test."

"Come in here, to my room."

He opened the glass door, bowed courteously as I passed, and then followed in. I found myself in a small room, which afforded me a sense of surprise. It was not that there

was anything particularly rare or striking in its furnishing: for its contents were harmoniously but almost austerely simple. What delighted and refreshed the eyes was the radiance without artificial light which filled the room as with the breath of summer. There was no fire, though I saw that the wood and coal in the grate were ready to be lit. Outside, the grimy day was already dark, and yet a soft light lingered, or appeared to me to linger, over the few book-shelves, over a quaint old spinet-shaped piano, and over a low dark oak-table whereon a vase of flowers stood. The only sign of luxury was in the flowers in this vase, and in others, smaller, on the book-shelves and by the dull ground-glass window at the end of the room. These were not only beautiful but rare: delicate orchids, late roses of an exquisite bloom and a yet more exquisite fragrance, sweet smelling autumnal violets.

"You are not cold? No? The fire would have been lit: but I had to be out most of today, and had returned only a few minutes before good fortune brought you here."

"If indeed you are a merchant of dreams the good fortune for me is something more than a mere happy chance."

"I will tell you," he began simply: when,

as he paused, I interrupted him to ask if he would inform me how it was his room was so full of a soft radiance, fugitive when steadfastly regarded, but always resting with a lovely light somewhere.

He smiled gravely, but did not answer at first. At last, pointing to the blooms, he asked if I did not think that flowers gave a lovely effulgence.

"I have heard that nasturtiums give off a flashing light at times, but surely flowers do not ordinarily emit a radiance as some phosphorescent fungi do?"

"So most people would say, no doubt. But flowers do. Only, they need an atmosphere. These pale roses you see in that bowl in the corner yonder: can you not see an effulgence from them like a faint flame? It is gone, because your eyes have already absorbed their just barely visible and, to our eyes, evanescent glow: but it is there all the same. If our eyes were trained to discern these subtle sidelights of nature we should know more both of the chemic and psychic influences in human life. For just as these frail and exquisite Clarimondes yonder will not grow in a clay soil, so they would swiftly fade in the still more fatal atmosphere created by the distempered body, the distempered

mind, the distempered soul. Flowers are as susceptible to adverse human influences as a mirror is to the breath of confined vapours. Have you never noticed, for example, how some people can wear flowers for a whole day, even for two days or more, without the blooms losing their freshness and sweetness: while with others flowers of the same kind, however newly pluckt, will fade and die in a quarter of the time, even in an hour. It is possible, in this instance, that this may be due to the amount, or quality, of animal magnetism given off by the wearer. But otherwise there is something more than this. I do not hesitate to say that the atmosphere of a man's impure heart and body, perhaps I might even say a man's corrupt soul, will kill a flower as surely as any noxious gas could do. Let the life be clean, the inner life be fair with fair hopes and fair thoughts, the brain be haunted by lovely images, processions, dreams, reveries, and nature becomes man's ally in a deeper sense than we imagine as possible. There are conspiracies to aid as well as to baffle us. A room may, at times, become as though filled with the loveliest subdued sunglow, and yet be without illumination from any fire or lamp. I say 'at times,' for it is not often, even with the happiest dreamers,

that one can know that balanced serenity wherein the body and the mind and the soul are in perfect harmony."

"Then you would place health before everything?"

"Yes: in the deep sense. Health *is* everything: just as those who talk for and against a rigorous ideal of Form in poetry are commonly oblivious of the fact that, in a deep sense, Poetry is Form. But the same mind has even more influence upon the individual life than the sane body has. Properly, one is the outgrowth of the other: but there is a serenity, a sanity, which can exist with a weak or frail body. The spirit is the dominant factor: not the stomach."

"You say you are called 'The Merchant of Dreams.' How would you give me a dream? Let me be explicit. I am not an unhappy man, as the common weal goes: but I am not happy. Life for me moves in narrow circumstances. I try to keep many avenues open: to have as wide and alluring perspectives as possible. But, for the most part, those 'hours of insight' are in sadly infrequent proportion to the 'hours of gloom,' as Matthew Arnold says in those ever memorable lines of his which you have affixed to your window. To-day I left my lonely bachelor

lodging in deep depression, partly physical, partly mental. A northerner, and bred to the hills and the sea, my heart sickened for the loved places of my childhood and youth and best years. But stronger than this was my longing for some relief from the diurnal commonplace of my life. Unable to work, I came to seek an old acquaintance, who, I fear, has sunk from depth to depth till submerged in the deep waters of degradation. It was in striving to find some trace of the present whereabouts of James Linton that I was directed to you. Now, if you can, tell me not only where Linton may be found: but give me, I pray of you, some dream that will ease my pain: that will irradiate what is left of this day, and will enable me to fall asleep fanned by the wings of some new joy, or peace, or hope."

"James Linton is dead."

"Dead!"

"Yes. He died about a week ago. I knew him slightly. He had sunk deep in those waters you speak of. He was a brilliant and able youth when I knew him first, when he was in the Embassy at Constantinople. His step-brother, Lord Ravelston, was my most intimate friend: and when Ravelston was mortally wounded in a wretched duel, some

twenty years ago now, he begged me, on his death-bed, to look after Linton."

For a moment I was puzzled. I knew the story of Lord Ravelston's tragic end, and of his strange wanderings throughout all civilised and uncivilised countries. His companion had been a man of even higher rank than his own: a man of European repute for his intellectual as well as for his social qualities: at one time a brilliant diplomatist: but who had suddenly disappeared from the ken of men while still in the prime of life, and was supposed either to have been murdered or to have followed the example of his younger brother (now a Cardinal) and entered a monastery in Rome.

"You must be the Marquis of——?" I exclaimed: an inconsiderate as well as a rude remark, escaped from me before I realised what I had said.

"My name is Gabriel Ambrose," replied my companion gravely.

"I have no past that concerns you or any one. As for your friend, James Linton, of whom I had seen nothing for many years, the best thing that could happen to him happened. If you wish to know more about him I can give you the name and address of a dear friend of mine who attended him at the last: a de-

voted Anglican priest who has given his whole life to the unrewarded and apparently thankless task of alleviating the human misery in this part of London. I call him 'the Forlorn Hope.'"

I thanked him, with assurances that I would take advantage of his suggestion. But, I admit, I was now more interested in what he had to tell me concerning dreams and dream life, than in my poor friend; who had already experienced that last of human dreams, which is for ever dusked with the gloom of the grave.

I feared I was intruding too much on his time: but he would not allow this. Frankly, I told him all I could about myself: my past, my present, my hopes, my more or less vague aspirations. In return, he told me somewhat concerning his method in the bestowal of dreams. Much I understood: much, again, was beyond my apprehension. But of one thing I came to feel sure: that, whatever the Merchant of Dreams himself thought, none could emulate him without being in some degree like him. Something of his welcome lore he could explain: but it was as though a healer of the sick were to expound some of the mysteries of his hypnotic powers, mysteries dependent, for their realisation, upon the innate, trained, and concentrated faculty which

produced them. Such an one might explain to you or me how to cure many a bitter ill, how to heal many a wound of mind or soul or body: but, when we came to emulate his example, should we not find that our will was a feeble autocrat over circumstance, our insight inadequate, our cherished, imagined faculty impotent to fulfil the empty authority of the will?

"Elsewhere," said my companion, vaguely indicating a box of papers, on a shelf where many portfolios and manuscript cases lay, "I have said in detail what at present I explain somewhat cursorily. In due time, many, I hope, will not only be able to accomplish what I have the great hapipness of doing, but will have a wider scope, a far more profound influence. You, my dear friend, will, I trust, live to see, in place of one old visionary, voluntarily residing — and, I may truly say, happily expiatively his misspent past — in this dreary district of a dreary region in one of the dreariest cities in the world: scores of men and women who, for rare qualities of mind and heart and out of deep knowledge of life and all the potentialities of good and evil, will be known among their fellows as, each in his own degree, a Merchant of Dreams."

Of what avail to repeat the mere extraneous mechanism wherewith my friend — for a dear and true friend he became from that day — conveyed to the mind of another the germ of some lovely vision of fair dream: a germ to expand and bloom forth either at once or speedily, and be as welcome as summer-rain in a time of drought, or the quietudes of windless sunshine after long days of storm and gloom. Rejoice! That was his magic word, his creed. Yet to none did he ever say quite the same things: for each he had a particular Sesame that none could apply but himself.

I was about to rise, after that first memorable visit, eager, yet reluctant to demand the favour I craved. But he saw, and anticipated my wish.

"Look," he said, as a fugitive ray of light, I know not whence, stole through the room: "Look, here is one of my messengers of joy."

I looked and looked again. The golden ray had vanished: but my eyes rested against a bloom of light everywhere, and my heart was eased with a new, strange gladness.

Out of that gladness, out of the vague trouble which followed, out of a sweet counsel given me, was born, a few hours later, this lyric.

In the heart a bird of sunshine
Singeth a sweet song:
None can do it wrong
Sweet breath of sunshine!

What is this sunny bird
With the rainbow-wings,
That singeth of secret things
The heart only hath heard?

I know not: but lo
The sun shines, and far
In the blue sky a star
Leapeth white as snow.
And when the night-tides flow
And the stars glisten
In the dark, I listen
And the bird of moonshine
Sings, where erst
The sun-song burst
From the bird of sunshine.

It was a week later before I was able to revisit the Merchant of Dreams. But in that week I learned secrets of a new life. The hours had all some rainbow-tint, seen if for a moment only, or as half convincingly as the levin-light when it lifts from cloud to cloud but does not penetrate the dense vapours.

I would have been happy, but for a sick longing to be in my own land, beside the sea, the isles, the mountains, where as child and boy I had been so happy, and had so lately re-

visited, only to come back to London with a deeper, a more insatiate nostalgia.

Something of this trouble I meant to explain to my friend, but I found it easier simply to hand to him these few quatrains, written at one of the rare times when the mind had triumphed, and the longed-for had become real and near.

I hear the murmur of rivers,
  I hear the ripple of streams:
Sweet is the sound as the music
    Of dreams.

I hear the wind in the pinewoods,
  The wind on valley and hill,
Its voice in the upland heather
    Whistling shrill.

I hear the green waves lapping
  Against the flute-voiced shore:
Dear seas that lave the headlands
    Of Eilanmòhr.

These summoning voices call me
  Here in the dense-throng'd street:
And I feel the hill-wind round me,
    And the sea at my feet.

These streets, these crowds, these houses—
  These fade in the murky day;
But the wind and the waves and the sunlight
    Stay.

He understood at once, all I had felt, all I would fain say. He smiled when I added that the worst sorrow was, that now, while the ache of longing was not dulled, all power of dream, of inward realisation, had gone. As for the relief of expression, that seemed an impossible thing.

But he began to talk of other things: first about my doings and projects, then about the friend I had come to that neighbourhood to seek; and thereafter about yet another friend whom we had ascertained we knew in common. This man, John Derwent by name, had renounced everything for the sake of a life of passionate devotion to the most poor and needy of a region that was not only poor and needy beyond common understanding, but was in a most literal sense feted with an atmosphere of squalid misery, or sordid vice, of abiding horror. We called our heroic enthusiast "The Forlorn Hope," though never to his face: for already he staggered under that bitter cross of martyrdom, knowledge of the fact that the battle, so long and strenuously fought, was, and had been from the first, and must needs be, a losing battle.

Then he showed me the MSS. on which he worked intermittently. These contained, he told me, all his store of dreams, which he

hoped to bequeath as a heritage to innumerable men and women. "My book is not only entitled 'The Art of Weaving and of Realising Dreams,' but tells how, and when, and where, this golden secret of one may be made a common joy. For it is a true saying, 'Life is a dream.' Calderon, as you know, wrote a play with that title, and the Japanese have a lyric drama so-called, and doubtless divers writers in divers lands have made a similar use of the phrase. But the truer reading should be: 'Life is a dream within a dream.' For happiness is only for the dreamer: though there be many dreamers, and many dreams, and many ways whereby dreams are entertained, or can be fashioned, or may be allured. You remember what I have before said to you? Let no awaking be without its rainbow-shimmer, let no sleep-faring be without its moonshine glamour. This, surely, we can all do: all who would have it so. But more than this is needful. The spaces of the noontide must be filled. The wide, featureless expanses in every diurnal span must be peopled, coloured, transformed. No hour should come, unattended by its dream, though that be fugitive as summer-lightning, shadowy as a tall aspen in mist, intangible as the falling of the dew. For, truly, the dreamless hours

are dead-sea-apples: surely, mayhap, but of dust and ashes within. Yet I would not have you, or any one, what is called 'a mere dreamer.' It is easy to make a fetish of a god, and in every worshipper the idolater is dormant. *Dream while you act: act while you dream.* What a little sentence in which to sum up all the long quest, the long travail, the whole store of wisdom of three score years!"

When I rose to say goodnight, the room was already charged with the fog, which had filtered through every possible crevice. Outside, there was the sound of sodden rain. Dull cries fell against the permeable, discoloured walls of vapour. The dreary squalid street was half deserted, and was the silenter for the painful absence of the wind, not an eddy, not a breath of which penetrated that dismal region.

But I left, radiant. A golden dream had been given to me by my friend: a dream to keep that night, and many days to follow, sweet and beautiful with a glad serenity.

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BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

The volume of "Dramatic Interludes," entitled *Vistas,* was originally published by Frank Murray in his *Regent Series* (The Moray Press, Derbyshire) in 1894. A few months later, the succeeding volume in the series was *Pharais: a Romance of the Isles,* the first of the writings issued by William Sharp over the signature "Fiona Macleod"; and *Vistas* is considered by some of his readers to be a link between the two methods of his thought and work. In the dedicatory Foreword written for the American edition (Stone & Kimball, Chicago, 1894) the author has explained his intention in these "dramatic interludes." Of the contents "The Black Madonna" appeared originally under the pseudonymn W. S. Fanshawe, in the one number of *The Pagan Review* (August, 1892) which was written entirely by William Sharp, as editor and contributors; "The Birth of a Soul" was printed in *The Chapbook* (Chicago, Sept. 15, 1894); "The Whisperer" appeared first in the American edition of *Vistas,* and was printed separately in *The Theosophical Review* (London, February, 1908) and is now for the first time issued in book form in England.

The three Tales in Part II were published in 1896 by Messrs. A. Constable & Co., in a volume entitled "Madge o' the Pool," together with one other tale, "The Coward." The American edition, under the title of "The Gypsy Christ" (Stone & Kimball) was published a year earlier, and contained other three tales: "A Venetian Idyll," "The Graven Image,"

"Fröken Bergliot." It is in accordance with the wishes of the author that these four tales are not included in the present volume.

The "Prose Imaginings" in Part III, with the exception of the fragment "The Merchant of Dreams," formed the contents of the volume entitled *Ecce Puella,* published in 1896 (by Elkin Matthew) in which year also appeared *The Washer of the Ford, Green Fire,* and *From the Hills of Dream,* by "Fiona Macleod." In a note to *Ecce Puella* William Sharp explained that:

"Ecce Puella" comprises all that the author cares to disengage from *Fair Women in Painting and Poetry,* an illustrated monograph which he undertook at the instance of the late P. G. Hamerton, for the *Portfolio* Series. It has, of course, been reworked into this, its essential form. "Love in a Mist" originally was published with illustrations in *Good Words.* "Fragments from the Lost Journals of Piero di Cosimo" appeared some years ago (1890) in two consecutive numbers of *The Scottish Art Review.*

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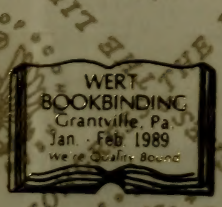
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